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**DRAMATIC THEORY AND
PRACTICE IN FRANCE
1690-1808**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE FRENCH
CLASSICAL DRAMA**

CLARENDON PRESS, 1912.

DRAMATIC THEORY AND PRACTICE IN FRANCE

1690-1808

BY

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PREFACE

THIS book, begun in 1914 as a series of lectures, was put aside owing to the pressure of other work till the present year. It attempts to trace the development of *comédie*, *tragédie*, and *drame* in France in the eighteenth century, and thus to define the relation between the dramatic art of the seventeenth and that of the nineteenth century.

It will be seen that during the period from 1690 onwards *drame* gradually superseded classical comedy and tragedy, and that when these two *genres* revived toward the end of the century, they were both tinctured with the manner of the *drame sérieux*. During the years of Revolution, serious drama took on a political colour, while the Napoleonic wars were fatal for the time to any new inspiration. The drama of the Romantic movement, together with the theories that accompanied that movement, will be seen to have had their roots in the dramatic experiments of the eighteenth century. A detailed study of certain plays of the Revolution period will be found in the Appendix.

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OXFORD.
July 1921.

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NOTE

In preparing this volume the author has consulted contemporary memoirs and criticism of the drama of the eighteenth century in addition to modern works of criticism referred to in the notes: to these the author wishes to express her great indebtedness. The Chronological Table, though not exhaustive, will, it is hoped, be useful as a guide to the contemporary development of *comédie*, *drame*, and *tragédie*.

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Erratum

Page 21, line 8, for Bratholo read Bartholo.

DRAMATIC THEORY AND PRACTICE IN FRANCE

1690-1808

~~CHAPTER I~~

ERRATA.

P. 16, lines 8, 9, *read* "public opinion has swung round, in the direction of the *drame*,"

P. 18, lines 8, 9, *read* "whole play had the effect of satire, and it was not affected by the growing sentiment of the time."

P. 21, line 8, *for* "Bratolo" *read* "Bartholo."

three centuries of modern dramatic development, it is evident that the eighteenth century, which lay between two great dramatic periods, cannot be merely put aside as unimportant. It was a period of transition and of experiment in all forms of art, including those of dramatic art. For, during that period, Art was gradually adapting itself to the conditions of modern democratic life. In other countries where the political tension was not so severe as in France, a different development is observed. England, for example, after the break in dramatic tradition caused by the Puritan revolution, sought for inspiration from France and produced comedies of manners (after Molière)

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DRAMATIC THEORY AND PRACTICE IN FRANCE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE Classical drama of the seventeenth century in France, the Romantic drama of the nineteenth century, are both familiar to serious students of French literature. In both cases the plays in question gain by being known to generation after generation of readers, and the fact of their being acted from time to time shows that they appeal to that general humanity in us which responded to the same touch in ancient Athens and in modern Paris, as Racine had observed. But now that we can look back on more than three centuries of modern dramatic development, it is evident that the eighteenth century, which lay between two great dramatic periods, cannot be merely put aside as unimportant. It was a period of transition and of experiment in all forms of art, including those of dramatic art. For, during that period, Art was gradually adapting itself to the conditions of modern democratic life. In other countries where the political tension was not so severe as in France, a different development is observed. England, for example, after the break in dramatic tradition caused by the Puritan revolution, sought for inspiration from France and produced comedies of manners (after Molière)

and comedies of character and of situation, which reflected the variable customs of society from the Restoration to the present day. But in France the shock to social life and thought caused by the French Revolution came at a later period than the break caused in England by the Puritan revolution. In France a dramatic national tradition had become fully established before 1789. The drama of the eighteenth century in France, while keeping to a large extent a traditional form, is thus useful as an illustration of contemporary social and political progress. Its criticism of society prepares our minds for the Revolution of 1789. Beaumarchais, before and after 1789, expresses, as well as any historian could do, the condition of the public mind ; and other writers, earlier in the century—even the imitators of Racine and of Molière, and the creators of the new drama which was intended to appeal to the sentiment of the audience—foretold, before Beaumarchais, the coming social conflict and class hatred. They showed, too, how a theory was being sought to justify and account for this movement, and also how feeling was forcing its way into thought and disturbing the plans of the abstract thinker, long before Rousseau had arisen to give expression to a new philosophy of emotion. Meanwhile the writers of tragedy were urging upon a selfish and careless age the true ideal of kingship as responsibility to the people for the people : and all dramatic writers were appealing to the *parterre* instead of to a literary clique for a final judgment on a work of art.

It may perhaps be objected that France was so pre-occupied in the eighteenth century with her own sudden and critical development that the atmosphere was not favourable to artistic detachment, and that the works of art produced during this period would not be in themselves of high value, though they might have a historical interest as a faithful picture of the time. It is true that events moved too rapidly for the complete development to fixity of any new *genre*. But, apart from the fact that the essential thing in a work of art is not the detachment of the artist, but the truth of his perception,

and his power of giving to that perception a form, many dramatists of the eighteenth century who were in touch with political events were able to bring a sense of proportion to their reflection of the social movement. Such was Beaumarchais. There is, too, a special interest in tracing the reflection in art of a great upheaval of society in France, where political and social thought, as well as personal experience, tend to find expression with a rapidity unknown to all but the Latin peoples. Thus, even though each dramatic experiment was an incomplete type, and the hasty succession of events hardly gave time for one form to come to perfection before another one was projected, yet the effect of the whole series of experiments is remarkable, and foreshadows the many new directions of the fuller national art that was to come. And as also the French nation cannot produce works of art without immediately seeing the bearing of a new experiment on the old theories of aesthetic, there arose, side by side with plays that were often shapeless or uncertain in purpose, a criticism that was enlarged step by step to meet the new order of things. The theories of Chapelain and of Boileau were developed, criticised, attacked, supplanted, and formulated afresh. Voltaire and Rousseau both supplied new theories, in opposition to each other, and Mercier reconciled them in a wider view, which was so far in advance of his time that he may almost be said to have anticipated the whole of the Romantic formula. Beaumarchais and Diderot too foresaw some of the stage-problems of modern times. From Boileau to the early years of the nineteenth century we have a long series of critical and explanatory prefaces to plays, and of pamphlets on dramatic theory, which show the regular and steady expansion of this branch of aesthetic in France. Every dramatic critic in France was also a playwright : every playwright as a rule a critic both of his own work and of the drama as a whole.¹ On many grounds it seems worth while to draw some writers from their ill-deserved obscurity, if only for the sake of the contributions to

¹ Many of the plays of the period have novelties in treatment, but their form shows a great feeling for tradition.

INTRODUCTION

dramatic theory which have been made as a consequence of their works. And more familiarity with these little-read writers, with Dancourt and Dufresny and Regnard, Destouches and Piron and Gresset, for example, as well as with the better-known Marivaux, Le Sage, and Beaumarchais, La Chaussée and Mercier and Diderot, Chénier and Lemercier, will show that they had on the whole the dramatist's power of putting contemporary life on the stage, and a sense of the value of dramatic art in illustrating a national and social ideal, and thus they find their place when we attempt to trace dramatic development from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.

Their plays, too, bear witness to the strong literary and moral tradition that binds together the French nation in history, even though, on the surface, rapid and revolutionary change may seem to govern its development. That literary and moral tradition may be thus defined : A nation which expresses in its art the social ideal of life, and rejects a selfish individualism, is a judge of the society it describes. In art which is rooted in such a tradition the moral judgment is shown in the measurement of real conditions by an ideal. Thus the morally constructive drama sets up an ideal, while a drama that is critical and destructive in its tendency treats real conditions, where they fall short of an ideal, with satire. In the eighteenth century, however, there was an attempt for a time to set up two new standards of judgment in aesthetic, and these were opposed to the tradition just described. As a result of the theories of the Physiocrats, and of some types of Encyclopaedic thought, art began to be judged by its utility to the nation. It was to be a means of direct moral instruction. As a result, again, of the views on natural philosophy and metaphysics held by Diderot and his followers, the ideas of the equality and rights of man, and the equal value given to all natural processes and all actions, affected art in the direction of realism. It was agreed that everything natural was equally good, and therefore a fit subject for art. The two theories are mutually destructive, for it is evident that a literal description of fact leaves out the motive of utility

and of moral teaching, unless the artist combines and describes his facts from a definite point of view. He must personally care to put a moral perspective into his scheme of things ; otherwise there will be no conflict, hence no tragedy ; no criticism, hence no comedy ; no feeling, hence no *drame*. Therefore, whatever was the theoretical adherence of the dramatist of the eighteenth century to the idols of utility and realism, practically the incompatibility of the two views decided him to abandon one of them in some degree. Either his logical sense helped him out of the maze, or the instinct of an artist led him to express a personal view, or the great literary and moral tradition which he shared caused him to be the unconscious partisan of the good. Thus the drama of the eighteenth century has permanent artistic value in so far as it is itself inconsistent with two mutually contradictory theories by which the nation was attempting to escape from its own fine tradition ; and we are led to see by a historical examination that a reaction caused by robust common sense and idealism is also to be traced in the eighteenth century. At the end of our period we find France recovering her relation to her great historical past, and dramatic art took a large share in enabling her to recover her equilibrium. The elements of idealism and criticism renew their force at the end of the Revolution period. When it is remembered that the theatres were the most general form of entertainment throughout the century, and that their doors were not altogether closed except for a rare moment at the height of the Terror, it will not be too much to assert that while the stage was not perhaps, as its writers desired, forming citizens by the sentiments uttered on the boards for that purpose, the wholesome salt of its satire and the bright flame of its enthusiasm were effective in time in restoring to a shaken society the power of self-criticism and self-determination. In the causes of the comparative failure of the art of the eighteenth century, as well as in its influence on a later age, there is, one cannot but believe, a field for interest and inquiry.

CHAPTER II

COMEDY

Imitators of Molière: Regnard—Difference of method between Molière and his imitators—Dufreany—Dancourt's painting of Bourgeois life—Fuller development of realistic description in *Le Sage*—Beaumarchais: rise of the Revolutionary spirit—His view of dramatic *genres*—Marivaux: his analysis of feeling in a restricted milieu—Followers of Marivaux: *La Noue*—Collin d'Harleville—His criticism of *L'Homme sensible*—Costume and scenery—Andrieux—His theory of comedy—Comedy after 1789: Picard—Result of the experiments of the eighteenth century in comedy.

[IT would have been difficult for any successors of Molière to avoid the dangerous homage of imitation of his methods. Molière had succeeded in making the theatre national in France, and in popularising the painting of manners in the middle classes of society.⁷ Now the whole tendency of the drama in the eighteenth century was to throw more light on the middle classes, and it is important to notice that from the days of Corneille onwards they had become regular playgoers in Paris. The early efforts of eighteenth-century comedy were therefore on Molière's lines, though at first of the nature of caricature of his methods. When writers of comedy began to reflect their own time more exactly, the relation with the spirit of Molière became greater, while the direct imitation of the master was slighter. Then appeared the more original dramatists of the comic stage of the eighteenth century, Marivaux and Beaumarchais; and definite homage was paid to Molière by writers of the new *genre*, the *drame sérieux*,¹ who did not yield to

¹ The idea of direct moral instruction through comedy was first suggested by Boursault, *Fables d'Aesope*, *Aesope à la Cour*, where Aesop was laid under contribution and a contemporary painting of manners connected with his moral teaching.

the writers for the comic stage in their appreciation of Molière's general aim.

In the transition from the works of Molière to those of the writers who are characteristic of the eighteenth century, the most important comedies are those of Regnard, Dancourt, and Le Sage. Le Sage marks the transition from the imitators of Molière to the writers of comedy with a political and social bias, the greatest of whom was Beaumarchais. Marivaux (1688-1763), though historically earlier than Beaumarchais (1732-1799), is not in the same line of development, and his original treatment of a limited dramatic field must be considered separately.

Of these writers, J. F. Regnard (1656-1710) was the closest to Molière both in time and in the character of his work. Like Molière he worked at first on the lines of Italian comedy, an early journey to Italy having interested him in the art of that country. His strange adventures gave him experience but did not damp his ardour. He was captured together with a Provençal lady by an Algerian corsair, and spent some years of slavery in Constantinople, from which condition he was finally ransomed. He travelled in Flanders, Holland, Denmark and Sweden, Lapland, Poland, Hungary, and Germany. Love and cards shared his interest with travelling, but at last he settled down to a quiet life in his country house at Grillon, and wrote most of his comedies there. He attempted at one time a tragedy, *Sapor*; he worked sometimes alone and sometimes with Dufresny. But after making many conventional experiments, he took Molière as his pattern, and his best comedies are formed on his master. As Molière had drawn upon the humours of the provinces, Regnard imitated him, and in *Le Joueur* made fun of the Auvergnat, Toutalas, and in *Le Bal* of the Gascon, Le Baron, but he had also come across many other types in his travels of which he made full use.

The form of his plays is very varied, their length may be one, or three, or five acts. For in Regnard the length of the play really depends on the size of the subject and thus his form is not conventional. A modern audience sometimes,

and somewhat unfairly, finds him long-winded in the longer plays. This is partly no doubt because his imitation of Molière leads Regnard to employ Molière's plan of catch-words or catch-phrases (like Orgon's 'Le pauvre homme'). Regnard, like Molière, repeats a comic effect when he once has achieved it, but Regnard sometimes trusts to an earlier comic association to make the second or third allusion seem amusing.¹ So, in *Le Légataire universel*, he uses the catch-phrase of 'l'éthargie'.²

The names given to the characters are the conventional ones. Lisette is a *suivante*, sometimes supplanted by Nérine: the heroine is Léonor, or Isabelle, the regular names of Italian comedy, or sometimes Angélique. The lover is Valère, or Dorante, or Éraste. Géronte is a name for an old man. The valet has many names: he is sometimes Crispin,³ or Merlin (who really produces wonders on the scene).⁴ Valets and soubrettes play a large part in this drama, so do masques and music.⁵ Lawyers and usurers are a butt for Regnard's sarcasm as doctors were for Molière's, but the attack on lawyers is one common to the whole of the eighteenth century, as is the insistence on the comic characteristics of the provinces of Normandy, Brittany, Gascony, Burgundy, Auvergne. Madame Bertrand and Madame Argante (both usual comedy names) jostle one another in the drama of Regnard.

One important difference between Molière and the writers of comedy in the eighteenth century is that Molière at his best does without accessories for his characters.

¹ Diderot does this too, as e.g. in *Est-il bon, est-il méchant?* where Madame Bertrand counts off the victims of Hardouin's kind and unkind interference.

² The language of the plays has gained in allusiveness from Regnard's journeys. A thief is an 'Arabe'; the hero in *Le Bal* wishes his enemy to be seized by corsairs.

³ Of the traditional Crispin on the stage, Grimm, *Corr. Litt.*, 1753, p. 72, says: 'Crispin est donc un valet singulièrement habile, gai, souvent bouffon, rusé, fourbe, employé par son maître aux mauvaises affaires et aux intrigues, ou occupé à le tromper et duper lui-même.'

⁴ 'Merlin' is an old name that occurs, e.g., in Boursault's *Mercure galant*, 1679. 'Pasquin' is also an old name and comes in Baron's *L'Homme à bonnes fortunes* (1686).

⁵ In *Le Bal*.

Their calling and their views so far as they are external to the plot are neglected ; the necessary setting and no more is given to the personages of his drama. We are aware that the households in *L'Avare* and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* are the ordinary middle-class households of the time : we can see the stratum of cultivated society in which the characters in *Le Misanthrope* and *Les Femmes savantes* move. But we are given no previous history and practically no present details of their circumstances, except where, as in the case of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, it is important to know that M. Jourdain has prospered. But in eighteenth-century drama (and in this respect nineteenth-century drama has followed closely on its antecedents) opinions and social conditions are insisted on, even when these are quite external to the plot. Now Regnard is not himself exempt from this habit ; he shows, in fact, the first symptom of the change, in *Le Joueur*, and *Le Légataire universel* : though he has less of what, from the point of view of drama, we may call a defect, than the writers of the *drame bourgeois*. A good deal of time is however taken up in his plays by the description of circumstances that do not develop character. We are told at length in *Le Légataire universel* about Géronte's will, about his relations and the different plans for the disposal of his money : but Géronte is left by the dramatist in the last scene of the last act exactly where he was at first. In *L'Avare* we are aware of a conflict in the mind of the miser, but while Géronte's opinion in *Le Légataire universel* is puzzled and changeable, he goes through no crisis of feeling or thought. Regnard, however, possesses a power of psychological description in detail which shows that he can observe human nature even though he cannot concentrate motives and action into the plot of his play. For example, he treats the subject of jealousy with great ability.¹ In the scene in *Le Joueur* between La Comtesse and Angélique, the subtle change from the well-mannered woman of the world to the jealous primitive woman is excellently indicated. Again, in the same play Angélique, softening

¹ See *Le Joueur*, Act II. sc. 2.

to Valère, is heard to say harder and harder things to him in a gentler and gentler voice : while the soubrette approves less and less as the scene goes on.¹ Here is an opportunity for a good actress to express the psychology of the real emotion of Angélique. But these character-studies do not control the plot. In *Le Joueur*, which had its English origin, and had been already treated by Dufresny, Regnard desired to make the character of Valère consistent all through the play. Valère goes off the stage saying to his valet :

‘Va, va, consolons-nous, Hector : et quelque jour
Le jeu m'acquittera des pertes de l'amour.’

This trait certainly gives the play a unity of meaning, but the extreme consistency of the hero's behaviour removes the action from life to mechanism and destroys our interest. Regnard's plays thus are precursors of the ‘well-constructed plays’ of Scribe in the nineteenth century ; the pleasure of the audience lies in an admiration of the author, who unravels a subtle mystery, or works out a problem set just one step in advance of the public which follows his moves. Besides exciting this interest in the plot as in a game to be guessed, Regnard produces amusement by insisting on laughable traits. This he does all through his *théâtre*, from the scene in *Le Bal* where the lover is hidden in the 'cello case, to the farcical scenes of plot and counterplot in *Le Légataire universel*. The sermon and the moral are to his mind of minor importance.

Regnard was followed by Dufresny (1648–1724), a slighter writer, with whom he often worked, but the *Esprit de contradiction* and *Reconciliation normande* are both amusing and vivacious though long drawn out. In *Le Mariage fait et rompu* the last words show Dufresny's inheritance of Molière's hatred of hypocrisy :

‘Tout bien considéré, franche coquetterie
Est un vice moins grand que fausse pruderie.
Les femmes ont banni ces hypocrites soins ;
Le siècle y gagne au fond, c'est un vice de moins.’

¹ *Le Joueur*, Act II. sc. 2.

The titles of Dufresny's plays always take the form of the paradox which suggests the type of plot treated in them ; besides those already mentioned we might instance *Le Double Veuvage* and *Les Mal-assortis*, and *La Malade sans maladie*. They are written in prose, and are so witty that they repay reading, even though what Dufresny calls 'l'architecture de la pièce' is sometimes hurried and imperfect. In some of his plays Dufresny has introduced 'vaudevilles' and songs, obeying the taste of the time for bringing in music to vary the monotony of a play.¹ Like Regnard, Dufresny works on quite conventional lines, trusting to the brilliance of his dialogue to carry off his pieces. He enhances this effect by constantly bringing on to the stage some character who is acutely aware of the motives and absurdities of the others. Frosine acts this part in *Le Double Veuvage*.

Dancourt (1661-1725) was attracted, like Molière, by the desire to paint the manners of the middle classes. At the end of the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth there was a great deal to observe, for the love of money and the love of pleasure dominated all classes, and produced a kind of confusion of values in which we find the strongest possible contrast to the century in which Corneille had reigned. Self-interest in every department was the motive of a society that lived under a corrupt government and had the example of a corrupt court before its eyes. Hopeless of being able to apply a remedy, the French at that time consoled themselves by getting all the material pleasure they could out of life. The drama of Dancourt reflects this condition, which he has finely observed. No character stands out in heroic contrast to the rest, but a whole bevy succeed one another in an eternal race for advantage. Dancourt had the qualities necessary for getting sharp impressions of this society upon paper. He got his effect by putting down a great deal of detail without feeling any fear of boring his audience. Take a little one-act play like *Le Tuteur*. The mystification of persons by night foreshadows a more famous scene in Beaumarchais' *Mariage*

¹ See the Prologue to *Le Double Veuvage*.

de Figaro, but there is very little comparatively at stake in *Le Tuteur*. Bernard and his accomplice, Lucas, are too evidently intended to be fooled by the rest. The moral is that only the person with wits can pursue an advantage and keep it. In the series of plays beginning with *Le Chevalier à la mode* we have better characterisation. Madame Patin has her ambitions, which are like those of Monsieur Jourdain in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, but the idea of the play is carried out more farcically than was the case in Molière's, and it is without the witty back-handed attacks by which the dupe, M. Jourdain, expresses his criticism of the society in which he attempts to move. There is, in the process, an immense amount of talking done on the stage, and this is in itself a satire on a class of society that engineered results by words instead of by wholesome labour.

In *Le Chevalier à la mode* Migaud, who is courting Madame Patin, says that he has always been afraid of her disposition, but is willing to marry her on account of family interests,¹ while Le Chevalier, who also is courting her, says to Crispin, the valet, in the plainest words, that he is in love with her money.² He is in the meantime accepting presents of horses and a carriage from a baroness to whose hand he is also a pretender. In these circumstances Migaud's plan is successful and the Chevalier, who is excluded, says that he only regrets Madame Patin's money and is intending to pay further attentions to the baroness.³ Dancourt has lifted the veil that obscures low motives,

¹ 'Écoute, Lisette, puisque tu me parles franchement, je t'avouerai de bonne foi que le caractère de Madame Patin m'a toujours fait peur, et que, sans certains intérêts de mon fils, je n'aurais jamais songé à l'épouser. Monsieur Serrefort, comme tu sais, appréhende que sa belle-sœur ne dissipe les grands biens que son mari lui a laissés en mourant; et c'est pour s'assurer cette succession, qu'en donnant Lucile à mon fils il ne consent à ce mariage qu'à condition que j'épouserai Madame Patin.'—Act I. sc. 5.

² 'Le Chevalier: Ce serait quarante mille livres de rente qu'elle possède, dont je pourrais être amoureux.

Crispin: C'est à dire, que ce sont les quarante mille livres de rente que vous épouseriez en l'épousant?'—Act I. sc. 7.

³ 'Il n'y a que les mille pistoles de Madame Patin que je regrette en tout ceci. Allons retrouver la Baronne, et continuons de la ménager jusqu'à ce qu'il me vienne quelque meilleure fortune.'—*Le Chevalier à la mode*, Act V. sc. 8.

and thus his drama is an account not so much of what people were accustomed to say, but of what they actually thought. The truth of the painting was undeniable, and the fidelity of his dialogue to unavowed reasons for conduct makes for a psychological realism that is at the same time strangely lacking in bitterness. While the attack on the vices of the time is as sharp as Balzac's on those of the age of Louis Philippe, there is no trace of resentment in Dancourt. He writes in a detached and good-humoured way that at first hides from the reader the selfishness and brutality of the human nature he exposes to view.

Dancourt works out his ideas further in *Les Bourgeoises à la mode* (1697) and *Les Bourgeoises de qualité* (1700). In the last-named play the characters only gradually detach themselves from their background, and this is one of the effects of Dancourt's very real art. They appear first of all to show some fixed idea, some clear tendency of the mind, and then touch after touch reveals them as persons. For example Naquart the *procureur* in the first scene says :

‘ Il ne s'agit point de conscience là-dedans ; et entre personnes du métier’

while Le Tabellion answers :

‘ ... Pourvu que je sois bien payé, et que vous accordez-vous-même toute cette manigance-là, je ne dirai mot, et je vous lairai faire, il ne vous en faudra pas davantage.’¹

In the next scene with the Procureur du Châtelet Naquart shows his extreme indifference to the evil of luxury,² while Blandineau regrets the better old times.³

¹ *Les Bourgeoises de qualité*, Act I. sc. 1.

² ‘ Votre femme aime le faste, la dépense ; c'est là, je crois, sa plus grande folie ; laissez-la faire. Au bout du compte, l'argent n'est fait que pour s'en servir ... vivons à présent comme dans le temps présent ...’—*Les Bourgeoises de qualité*, Act I. sc. 2.

³ ‘ Je suis ennemi des superfluités, je me contente du nécessaire, et je ne sache rien au monde de si beau que la simplicité du temps passé.’—*Les Bourgeoises de qualité*, Act I. sc. 2.

His wife has the gaming habit of the age :

' J'ai joué, j'ai perdu, j'ai payé, je n'ai plus rien, je vais rejouer, il m'en faut d'autre en cas que je perde.'

and explains to her husband that it is by 'complaisance' that she lives in a cottage in the country with him and his tiresome family, ' J'aime à paraître, moi ; c'est là ma folie.'¹

It is the waiting-maid, Lisette, who presently makes the situation clear. While Blandineau considers that his wife must be out of her mind, Lisette remarks that Madame is very wise, she takes her pleasure, and gives her husband all the trouble. ' Qui est le plus fou de vous deux ? ' Blandineau can make no real impression on the conditions round him. As one person after another comes on to the scene, all are moved by some spring of selfishness, but their selfishness reveals itself as different in different characters. Blandineau will not face the new standard of life, his wife will not give up her ambition, nor her sister her desire to be a great lady and to be worshipped as young and beautiful. Angélique is less unsympathetic because her faults are the faults of youth, and she is puzzled by life, while Lisette is clear-sighted; but the scheme by which Angélique gains her lover and M. Nacquart marries Blandineau's sister-in-law is a stage trick which would only be tiresome were it not that the result shows up the shallowness of La Greffiére, who is to become Madame Nacquart, and of the other characters in the compact. Every one has been ready to take the easy path, and to give up love and honour for an income. It is thus a decadent society which Dancourt paints : the nobility has lost its glory, the bourgeoisie is losing its simplicity in imitating the decadent. As the chorus of peasants sing at the end of the play :

' Chacun ressent la vérité
Du ridicule ici traité :
Tout est orgueil et vanité
Dans la plus simple bourgeoisie.
Du ridicule ici traité
Paris fournit mainte copie.'

¹ *Les Bourgeoises de qualité*, Act I. sc. 6.

Even as early as 1700, when this play was first acted, there were many allusions to revolutionary feeling in the air. The high prices and expense of living are mentioned, together with an assurance that the world was in an epoch of revolution, while offices are bought by Madame Carmin and Madame Blandineau for their husbands.¹

The names Dancourt gives his characters show very little change from Molière. The *suivante* is generally Lisette, the *ingénue* Angélique, the farmer Lucas, the valets La Fleur, L'Olive, L'Epine, La Montagne, or sometimes Crispin or Jasmin. Many peasants come in, whose names are those of the peasants of light opera, and the dialect is (as in Molière) that of the suburbs of Paris, or the country closely adjoining the capital. There is then the traditional frame in Dancourt, but a realism of treatment which prepares us for the more bitter realism of the plays which come later in the century, and the type of which is the *Turcaret* of Le Sage. Piron and Gresset, Boissy and Fagan were writing comedies of society during this time of transition.

Le Sage, in *Turcaret* (1709), which is his most remarkable play, uses the method of realism which we have found in Dancourt, but succeeds in creating a type that is a worse satire on the *bourgeois* than Dancourt's characters had been. Turcaret has risen in the world, but brings up to the surface all the vices of the different strata of society with which he has mixed. And it is made clear that each section of society claims to rise in turn until the very lowest moves up. At the end of the play Frontin, the *valet trompeur*, rejoices at Turcaret's defeat, and believes that his own reign has begun.² In the *critique* of the play Le Sage makes one character in the dialogue ask if Frontin's reign would not end, as Turcaret's did, in disaster. Asmodée, the demon, answers : 'Vous êtes trop pénétrant.' In the same dialogue one of the two interlocutors says that the picture of the times is too true to life : while a Spaniard is made to complain of the lack of intrigue in the play, for intrigue

¹ *Les Bourgeoises de qualité*, Act II. sc. 4; Act III. sc. 9.

² 'Voilà le règne de Monsieur Turcaret fini ; le mien va commencer.'

was still demanded in Spain at the time, though the French comedy of character did without it. From the point of view of public success, says the demon Asmodée, the piece is not interesting. It is realistic, and makes vice hateful, but it does not excite sympathy for the characters : 'faire aimer les personnages.'

Le Sage's criticism of his own play, then, shows that public opinion has swung round, partly through the influence of the *drame*, to demanding in comedy some characters with which the audience would be in sympathy. On the whole, however, Le Sage's plays take little part in this new development.

Le Sage (1667-1748), in his desire to live by the results of his literary work, expressed one change that was rapidly taking place in the eighteenth century. The literary patron who ensured the freedom of the artist from all the anxieties of life, and left him to exercise the highest and most delicate art in the most comfortable conditions, was already a thing of the past. In the future, art must appeal to the populace, and the artist must live upon the sale of his work. Not only then in the drama, but in other forms of literature, the writer had henceforth the public in his mind. He had gained his liberty from a sometimes oppressive aristocratic patronage, but he had bartered it for the favour of the crowd. Le Sage felt the difficulty of the position. 'Je cherche à satisfaire le public,' he said, when reproached for his bitter attacks against actors in *Gil Blas*, 'mais le public doit permettre que je me satisfasse moi-même.'

The country from which Le Sage drew his inspiration was Spain ; both his prose-writing and his drama bear the marks of this influence. As a dramatist Le Sage used several *genres*. He wrote for the Théâtre de la Foire, and contributed largely to its temporary revival. He also wrote for the Opéra-comique, and did a great deal for this new *genre* of drama.

Even in the translations from the Spanish, which formed the material for all his earlier plays, Le Sage showed that he had the gift of style ; and a style that could accommodate itself to the delineation of many different types of characters.

Spanish liveliness seems to have communicated itself to him ; he had the gift of beginning his scenes with appropriate and easy dialogue, and ending them on a note of expectation which linked the different scenes and acts together. The facts that the Spanish play included a well-marked intrigue, and also that the characters were individual, were not without their influence on Le Sage, but he had also the native French sense of form, and reduced the play *No ay Amigo para Amigo* from five acts to three before its representation in Paris in 1702. His first original play, *La Tontine*, was written in 1708, but was withdrawn by the author, and then produced again in 1732. It is extremely slight and imitative. *Crispin rival de son maître*, acted in 1707, marks a considerable advance on the earlier plays. The characters all bear the conventional names of comedy ; but Crispin, in this play as in *La Tontine*, is the person of invention and skill, the valet upon whom his master wholly depends, and who takes a tone of equality with him from the first moment of the action. The satire on a society in which the valet could be taken for a gentleman is sufficiently marked, and the dishonesty of Crispin is equalled by the dishonesty of his young master, who does not pay him his wages and lets him live by his wits. The selfish hunting for money is expressed here as in Dancourt's plays, but instead of bare realism, Le Sage uses satire, and the whole treatment is more light and witty than in Dancourt. Valère is speaking of his attraction to Angélique, and the riches of her father :

VALÈRE : Oui, il a trois grandes maisons dans les plus beaux quartiers de Paris.

CRISPIN : L'adorable personne qu'Angélique !

VALÈRE : De plus, il passe pour avoir de l'argent comptant.

CRISPIN : Je connais tout l'excès de votre amour ...¹

Madame Oronte, the mother of Angélique, with her weak heedlessness, is well depicted. Though she is only moved by

¹ *Crispin rival de son maître*, sc. 1.

the emotion of the moment, and is subject to flattery, she believes herself to be guided by reason.

'Effectivement, Lisette, je ne ressemble guère aux autres femmes : c'est toujours la raison qui me détermine.'¹

Le Sage treated vice like folly by making it ridiculous, but as there were few good traits in the play (except perhaps the honesty of Monsieur Orgon) upon which to dwell, the whole play had the effect of satire, and it was not under the prevailing influence of the *drame*. *Turcaret* (1709) was written at a bitter moment, when the war of the Spanish Succession was at its height. It is possible that the unconscious juggling with money to serve private ends, which was one of the consequences of the condition of public finance, urged Le Sage to greater harshness in his attitude to all forms of making profit or pleasure out of money. Allusions to play occur all through the piece² : and in the third act occurs the conversation with M. Rafle in which the latter details to Turcaret the cases of honest men who have been swindled and beggared. The tone of the whole play would suggest a later date in the eighteenth century, but in reality it comes early, though the note of bitterness forestalls the attitude of the people under Louis XVI, when they revolted again, and with effect, against the pressure of money exactions on the part of the government. Le Sage then reflects satirically in his plays the elements of danger in contemporary manners.

More than half a century later a very similar method was used by Beaumarchais, whose genius was more brilliant, and who has left plays written at different epochs of his development and at different stages of the revolutionary upheaval of society. His first interest, like Le Sage's, was in Spanish literature. He was an artisan by birth, then became a courtier, and was finally ennobled. In the course of his adventurous life he went to Madrid. On his return from Spain he wrote *Eugénie* (1767), *Les Deux Amis* (1770), *Le Barbier de Séville* (1772-1775), and then *Le Mariage*

¹ *Crispin rival de son maître*, sc. 5.

² See e.g. Act I. sc. 2 ; Act II. sc. 3 ; Act III. sc. 8.

de Figaro. *La Mère coupable* was printed later, in 1792. Beaumarchais was an agent in secret politics, but was always a suspect, and was only saved by the death of Robespierre and the Revolution of the 9th Thermidor. He died in 1799.

His first considerable success was *Le Barbier de Séville*. When the play was printed, he added to the title : 'représentée et tombée sur le théâtre de la Comédie Française.' The fact was that the original five acts were found to be too long and the play had to be shortened. The Spanish background was in reality only a setting for the Gallic gaiety of the play. In later years Beaumarchais said¹ that the *Barbier* and the *Mariage de Figaro* were slight attempts preparatory to the '*drame moral*' in which he wished to combine fun and pathos, the intrigue of a comedy and the emotional appeal of the *drame*. This points to the development attempted later in *La Mère coupable*.

Le Barbier de Séville was originally intended for an opera, and it has been twice set to music, by Paisiello and by Rossini. The well-knit intrigue of the play, the amusing situations and witty dialogue, have gained immensely by the new type of valet whom Beaumarchais has put upon the scene, a man of wit and thought, 'le valet-maître,' whose efforts are only counter-marched by the calumny uttered by Basile, the unsympathetic character in the play. The force of evil-speaking and slandering in checking the best-matured plans has never been more forcibly put. Beaumarchais knew that *Le Barbier de Séville* and *Le Mariage de Figaro* were both politically hazardous as plays, since they reflected with uncompromising realism some shades of public opinion : but he meant to produce them, and storm convention in its citadel. Of the *Barbier* he said : 'Il faut qu'elle soit jouée ou jugée.' In a conversation with the King he is reported to have said that he would bring down the Bastille. The King repeated the phrase afterwards as a literal forecast of what was going to happen.² Beaumarchais was addicted to these sudden and bold flights of speech. He said, also, that he intended to have his play represented, even

¹ See the Preface to *La Mère coupable*.

² The King said the play was 'injouable.'—Grimm, *Corr. Litt.*, vol. xi. p. 39.

if it had to be in the chancel of Notre Dame. And again ; 'Ainsi, dans *Le Barbier de Séville*, he says, 'je n'avais qu'ébranlé l'État.' Napoleon afterwards said of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, 'C'était la Révolution déjà en action.'

It has been noticed by Sainte-Beuve that French society at that moment was itself exciting ridicule against the aristocracy, and against all law, order, and authority. A play which satirised and travestied society was sure to be popular.¹ But at the same time a group of operettas became popular which were mainly framed on the model of *Le Roi et le Fermier* by Monsigny, and they gave an unreal picture of the peasant's life and represented it as preferable to a king's.² Each class of society had for different reasons an inaccurate view of the other, but when Beaumarchais wrote there was still a feeling of security, which turned out to be unfounded. Without this feeling of security, however, it would have been impossible for a French audience, with its love of pleasure, to have enjoyed seeing Figaro on the stage.

The development of the character of Figaro, himself a new type, but an inheritor also of some of the best traditions of the stage, illustrates in Beaumarchais' three most important plays the rise of the revolutionary spirit. While the *drame* was driving the valet and the soubrette off the stage, the *comédie* shows the development of the valet from the stock figure of the plays immediately succeeding Molière to the ingenious Crispin and the unscrupulous Frontin of *Le Sage*; and the series culminates in Figaro, who represents the rise of the *tiers état*, and whose brain produces all the helpful expedients in the working out of the intrigue.

The Figaro of the *Barbier* (1775) explains that he takes life gaily because he is so unhappy.³ Immediately afterwards he assures the Count that he is governed by the desire for his own interest and can be thoroughly trusted to bring

¹ Grimm, vol. iii. p. 219, notices that a comedy, *Le Négociant*, played in 1763, was an attack on society. 'Tout est de la dernière grossièreté dans cette comédie ... C'est un tissu d'injures contre les gens de qualité.'

² Hardly a year passed during the second half of the eighteenth century without seeing one or two rustic operas, all practically on the same theme. See Grimm, *Corr. Litt. passim*.

³ Act I. sc. 3.

this about.¹ When Almaviva realises that Figaro can be useful to him, Figaro sees at once that it is the Count's self-interest that has brought them together.² Thus Figaro expresses the bitterness of the working class towards the masters, whose courtesy is only an occasional reward of continual service done for them.

Beaumarchais supports the view of Figaro by the action of the other characters, Bratholo expresses to the Count his disdain of rank,³ and in the same scene the Count criticises the administration of the law.⁴

The Figaro of *Le Mariage* (1784) is an older man, and is the critic of society as a whole. Beaumarchais explains in the preface that comedy, as understood by him at that time, satirises not one type of man but a whole set of social abuses. The author himself notices one curious fact, viz. that an eighteenth-century audience would have enjoyed the criticism if it had taken the form of serious or moral drama : in other words, if it had been constructive instead of destructive ; but the same incidents occurring in a comedy and treated with satire only alienated public sympathy. The truth is that in 1784 society felt the facts too acutely, and facts have to be somewhat remote from living experience to bear being treated with comic emphasis. The Figaro of this play is at once the defender of public morality and the comic satirist. It is not only Figaro who expresses these views. When Almaviva thinks he has convicted his wife of infidelity, Antonio the gardener criticises the situation by saying that this would only be a fair return for the harm the Count himself has caused.⁵ Thus the changed condition of society is reflected in this play (first acted in 1784). Figaro protests with Suzanne against the rights of the *seigneur* over the morals and life of the villagers, and the

¹ 'Je n'ai qu'un mot ; mon intérêt vous répond de moi ; pesez tout à cette balance ...'—Act I. sc. 4.

² 'Peste ! comme l'utilité vous a bientôt rapproché les distances !'—Act I. sc. 4.

³ 'Vous sentez que la supériorité du rang est ici sans force.'—Act IV. sc. 8.

⁴ 'Les vrais magistrats sont les soutiens de tous ceux qu'on opprime.'—Act IV. sc. 8.

⁵ Act V.

Count answers in a sententious tone, agreeing that the shameful right should be abolished for reasons of abstract justice.¹ Then, in the scene where Marceline declares her history, a scene of which only a portion was acted, there is an attack on the selfishness and vice of men, and a clear explanation of the economic difficulties which were affecting the position of women,² and of the low esteem in which even men of high rank held their wives—all this reading like the manifesto of someone interested in the more serious side of problems concerning women.³ Figaro too discourses on the helpless elements in the State: as, for example, the soldier who is under orders.⁴

The last ‘couplet’ which ends the play is the author’s comment, though it is Brid’oison who speaks:

‘Or, Messieurs, la comédie
Que l’on juge en cet instant
Sauf erreur, nous peint la vie
Du bon peuple qui l’entend.
Qu’on l’opprime, il peste, il crie,
Il s’agit en cent façons,
Tout finit par des chansons.’⁵

The two plays, *Le Barbier de Séville* and *Le Mariage de Figaro*, are thus intimately connected. In the ‘lettre’ which prefaces the printed edition of the first play Beaumarchais seems to see that the maxim ‘All men are brothers’ is in opposition to the practical working of self-interest. Envy and jealousy, spite and traducement occur when interests are in opposition. Thus Beaumarchais takes the bases of encyclopaedic thought and shows that they are incompatible with one another.

¹ ‘L’abolition d’un droit honteux n’est que l’acquit d’une dette envers l’honnêteté.’—Act I. sc. 10.

² Men were taking up trades which concerned women’s dress, an employment which Marceline felt should be left to women.

³ Act III. sc. 16.

⁴ ‘Sommes-nous des soldats qui tuent et se font tuer pour des intérêts qu’ils ignorent?’—Act V. sc. 12.

⁵ Or as Grimm puts it, *Corr. Litt.*, 1774, p. 274: ‘O le joli enfant que le peuple français! Comme il se dépète quand on l’agace! . . . Comme il se radoucit, et comme il est bon quand on le fait rire!’

In the same preface Beaumarchais outlines his view of dramatic *genres*. It is the will of the author, he says, which gives direction to the type of a play. And as he thinks the circumstances in life enshrine both the comic and the pathetic, he refuses to bind himself down to consider an event as ticketed for comedy or *drame*. The same events, read in a comic sense, might give us a play such as *Le Barbier*, and read in a pathetic sense might give us a *drame* such as he sketches out in this preface, full of *reconnaisances*, predictions, and tragic situations.

To show how Beaumarchais would treat a subject as *drame* it is sufficient to study *La Mère coupable*, in which the same characters appear as in the two preceding plays. *La Mère coupable* was not acted till 1797. It bears the marks of the tragic time and of the movement of thought which had preceded it. The Count and Countess have ceased to be addressed ceremoniously. Figaro and Suzanne are unable, with all their old-time devotion, to protect their master and mistress against injury, loss of wealth and position, and mischief made by false friends. Family troubles bring in the discussion of divorce, formerly an impossible idea.¹ Clubs and political pamphlets are mentioned in the variant of one scene,² and there are frequent allusions to the instability of government and society. Meanwhile the *drame* has influenced Beaumarchais. The Countess, when once her faults and those of her husband are made plain, appeals in the same breath to the mercy of God and to the sentiment and emotion of the audience. In an expansive sentence, which sums up the emotional and moral instability of the century, she says the Count's illegitimate daughter shall be as dear to her as her own, and then she assumes, in a way that is human, but not on a high level of social ethics, that in the case of the Count and herself one fault has wiped out the other.³

But in *La Mère coupable* Beaumarchais has tried to show that the oppressor and mischief-maker is not really

¹ Act I. sc. 4; Act III. sc. 2.

² Act I. sc. 12.

³ 'Faisons, sans nous parler, l'échange de notre indulgence.'—Act III. sc. 2.

the representative of the old aristocracy, but Bégearss, the wire-puller and agitator. How many of his audience realised against whom the last words of the play were directed :

‘Un jour a changé notre état ; plus d’opresseur, d’hypocrite insolent : chacun a bien fait son devoir. Ne plaignons point quelques moments de trouble ; on gagne assez dans les familles quand on en expulse un méchant.’

The word Bégearss is a scarcely veiled variant of Bergasse, the name of the *avocat* who was Mesmer’s first pupil in his experiments¹ and Beaumarchais’ enemy, and who was himself one of the authors of *La Journée des dupes* (1790), a trenchant satire on the politics of the day. Yet it does not take much imagination now to understand that Beaumarchais, who had suffered through Robespierre, had him also in his mind. The words, too, were true in more senses than perhaps Beaumarchais knew. Few of those who lived through the Terror knew that the Baron de Batz was exciting the envy and suspicion of the revolutionary leaders against one another in revenge for their attitude to constitutional government and the monarchy in France. The impossibility of understanding or of co-operation among political parties at that time is now known to be the result of his machinations. Money and secret intelligence gave him the power to destroy confidence by playing on evil passions and especially on the fear felt by one conspirator of another. But though Beaumarchais probably did not possess this clue to the uneasy situation, he has powerfully depicted both the atmosphere of insecurity produced, and the elusive and evil personalities that caused it. Bégearss is a type of hatred incarnate : and this was the form of evil that was most feared in France when *La Mère coupable* was written. Beaumarchais completed his dramatic work by a fantastic and vigorous opera, *Tarare*, in which he attacked the vices of the monarchy under cover of a story

¹ Grimm, *Corr. Litt.*, vol. xii. p. 172. See *Appendix* for a discussion of this point.

of Eastern despotism : he also attacked the unscrupulous use of power by the priests of the Church in France. The opera is original and fiercely satirical.¹ It was performed just before the outbreak of the Revolution, and shows no tendency to sentiment, or to the accommodation between new and old ideals which we trace in *La Mère coupable*, a piece which was not acted till a later date.

The realism traced in the work of Le Sage and of Beaumarchais took an entirely new direction, and that a non-political one, with Marivaux (1688–1763). He lived and died before the outbreak of the great Revolution, but his work, though slight, was in its way prophetic, both of the condition of the *ancien régime* when society was restricted and trying to hold its own against the onslaught of the people, and also of the interest in psychology which is aroused in all strongly self-conscious social conditions. Thus the psychological method of Marivaux was true to his own time, and also likely to prove of interest in the nineteenth century, when, after the Revolution, France was consciously remaking her own social life. But in Marivaux's time psychological analysis was exercised within limits deliberately set, and the grosser elements in life were eliminated. More modern psychological drama admits practically everything as material for analysis.

What was new in Marivaux's comedy for his own time was that he renounced both intrigue and the notion of conflict in the play, and substituted a series of actions and reactions in the emotion of the characters of his drama. Marivaux's *théâtre* is then really the *théâtre* of the salon, of the sheltered, cultivated, emotional life, with its subtle shades of expression. It leads on to the slight psychological

¹ See Grimm, *Corr. Litt.*, 1787, p. 408 : '... L'auteur de *Tarare* aura toujours le mérite d'avoir présenté dans cet opéra une action dont la conception et la marche ne ressemblent à celle d'aucun autre ; d'avoir eu le talent d'y donner assez adroitement une grande leçon aux souverains qui abusent de leur pouvoir, et de consoler les victimes du despotisme en leur rappelant cette grande vérité, que le hasard seul fait les rois et le caractère des hommes ... Après avoir dit leur fait aux ministres, aux grands seigneurs dans sa comédie du *Mariage de Figaro*, il lui manquait encore de le dire de même aux prêtres et aux rois ; il n'y avait que le Sieur de Beaumarchais qui put l'oser ...'

comédies de salon of Alfred de Musset: and, as we have suggested, it contributes something to the modern problem play, which, though raising larger issues, and dealing with more varied material, has this in common with Marivaux's drama, that the limits of the action are extremely narrow, and that the emotions in play are those of a highly sensitive social order. The differences are of course even more clearly marked than the likenesses. Other motives beyond those of passion and *galanterie* are given a place in the modern drama. Hereditary instincts, and family ties of a conservative order, at war with the ideals and desires of a younger generation—the claims of ambition and revenge and their destruction of the domestic instincts—the discussion of these facts lets in fresh subjects of debate into a modern play. But Marivaux's drama reflects a sheltered hothouse condition of society which was even then rapidly becoming extinct. It is an isolated society, and the insistence on etiquette and on the psychology of the affections reminds the reader of the haunting picture of the aristocrats in prison during the Terror, who within their prison and in spite of its discomforts carried on the game of social life up to the very guillotine.

'Marivaudage' was really the study of social psychology in its isolated condition, and thus it was opposed to the political development of the time. It is with difficulty that the characters in Marivaux's plays remember what they ought to think at any moment about the general situation and the facts which surround them. The necessity for education, the excellence of a simple and virtuous life, uncomplicated by etiquette, the equality produced by a true affection—these are the real subjects of thought in Marivaux's period, but they seldom come to the surface in his plays. If they do, Marivaux is so good an artist as to bring them into direct connexion with the intrigue, as when in *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*, the double disguise causes the hero and heroine to think that the one has fallen in love with the soubrette, and the other with the valet. In his first plays Marivaux exercises the diplomacy of love with a sort of *précieux* grace, very reminding of the lighter

dialogues of the Elizabethan stage,¹ but in the later plays, beginning with *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* (1730), there is indication of a conflict between the will and passion. It is conceivable that Marivaux, writing for the lady who took the part of the heroine, deepened his conception of Silvia to suit her powers; for there are passages where Marivaux seems to rise above his usual manner. It is evident to anyone who examines the influence on Marivaux of the seventeenth-century stage, that he owes a good deal to the *Misanthrope* of Molière. He has, in fact, developed the form of that play and used it for a much slighter presentation of life.

Marivaux, then, without touching any very vital chord, reflects social life within conditions that are artificially limited, and however true the feeling of his characters, the mere fact of the positions in which he places them with regard to the world and with regard to one another prevents him from dealing with any problems beyond those of a delicate sentiment. His plays are an attempt at realism within ideal imaginary conditions. What he takes for the world is frankly called a salon by later writers.

The characters in his plays do not moralise as do the characters in his novels, and Marivaux's attitude to the *drame* would probably be that it was a novel put upon the stage. His own novels affected the *drame*, but his *théâtre* is pure comedy and is itself unaffected by the new development in drama. Mention should be made here of a single excellent comedy by La Noue (1701-1761), whose chief inclination was to tragedy, but who in *La Coquette corrigée* (1756) gave the Théâtre Français a comedy in verse, light and amusing, full of *esprit*, closely studied from life and well constructed. The characters live in the same world as Marivaux, but they have more force, more real life, and the moral of the play is that affection discovers the true woman and makes her unable to play at love or to bear the artificiality of a hollow society. Orphise, the aunt of Julie, still

¹ E.g. in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*.

young and attractive, has her following of men, but though able to keep Clitandre by her side, she not only allows, but encourages him to make love to Julie, as she sees that the hope of a real love will cure Julie's insatiable thirst for flirtation. Orphise's scheme succeeds, and the development of Julie's heart makes the interest of the piece and the opportunity of the actress who plays the part.

In a slighter comedy, *L'Obstiné*, which was never acted, La Noue seems to have been able to combine grace of form with realism of observation.

During the later years of the century another experiment of the same kind, though much less artistic, was tried by Collin d'Harleville. Like Marivaux, this writer used verse for the most part as his medium, and this at once separates both authors from the writers of *drame*, part of whose creed it was to use prose. D'Harleville, like Marivaux, chose a restricted frame for the action of his play. Like Marivaux, too, he depends for its interest on the psychological analysis of mood and sentiment. But d'Harleville chooses the middle class rather than the cultured or fashionable class for his studies : and the transition from one writer to the other is the transition from the first to the second half of the eighteenth century. His popularity may be partly due to his traditional merits and qualities. He was perhaps the only writer of his time who kept the classical formula for comedy, while at the same time he consulted the taste of the age in his painting of character. Diderot, whose criticism was acute, saw that d'Harleville was a writer but not a dramatist :

‘ Il y a là-dedans du talent, il y en a beaucoup. Les vers sont faciles, bien tournés ; style comique ; mais une action faible ; cela n'a point de corps, point de soutien ; c'est une pelure d'oignon brodée en paillettes d'or et d'argent.’¹

His first choice of titles shows an imitation of the old type of comedy : *L'Inconstant*, *L'Optimiste*, *Le Vieux Célibataire* ; but *Monsieur de Crac dans son petit castel*, *Les*

¹ *Notice sur Collin d'Harleville*, ed. Laplace, Sanchez et Cie, p. xi.

Châteaux en Espagne, are more original. His last two comedies are *Les Mœurs du jour* and *Malice pour malice*. It was through the help of a friend, Desalles, who prevailed on Madame Campan and the Duc de Duras to ask the Queen's leave for *L'Inconstant* to be performed at Versailles in 1784, that d'Harleville first obtained a hearing. The names of the characters in this play are conventional, and suggest the usual types, but the heroine, Eliante, is a young English widow, and the inclusion of this character is in accordance with the fashion for what was English that marked those years. Crispin, the valet, is of the type put on the boards by Le Sage. He is inclined to take command of his master, Florimond, who, with the inconstancy that is his title-rôle, gets tired of the valet :

FLORIMOND : Crispin ! ... Oh le sot nom !

CRISPIN : Monsieur ?

FLORIMOND : (*à part*) : La sotte face !¹

The valet, however, refuses to be driven away :

‘ Trouvons un stratagème
Pour le servir encore en dépit de lui-même.’²

But, like an eighteenth-century hero, Florimond gives a philosophical reason for his inconstancy. If everything is under the law of change, why not man's own mind ?³ Crispin has a quickness of wit that corresponds to the emergency. He, too, can become another type of valet, La Fleur, with a Gascon accent. Florimond takes him back under the new name :

‘ Je te reprends. Mais si tu veux qu'on t'aime
Plus de Crispin.’⁴

The actual intrigue is not particularly interesting—but the speech of the inconstant Florimond at the end of the play is in character. He cannot act up to any principles, he will therefore make a principle of inconstancy. He will

¹ *L'Inconstant*, Act I. scs. 7, 8.

² *Ibid.*, Act I. sc. 8.

³ ‘ Tout passe, tout finit, tout s'efface, en un mot, tout change : changeons donc, puisque c'est notre lot.’—Act I. sc. 9.

⁴ Act II. sc. 5.

travel from place to place, be free to admire all the women he sees, being freed from the bondage of faithfulness to any one of them.¹

In 1788 *L'Optimiste* was performed. The title is a word which had been brought into use by Leibniz and by Voltaire his critic, and D'Harleville's play is a not unpleasing satire on a man who thinks everything delightful in his surroundings, while his niece, his daughter, his secretary, all have reason to be unhappy, and M. de Plinville the optimist does not see or is not afflicted by their *ennuis*. In fact he lives in a happy dream which the cares of others do not destroy. His wife has no illusions, but tries in vain to pierce the self-satisfaction, expressed, for example, as follows :

'Le château de Plinville est le plus beau du monde'²;

and again

'L'homme n'est ni méchant, ni malheureux, ni sot.'³

Even a fire and bankruptcy do not disturb his equanimity—only when his daughter's lover gives her up after the latter fact with pretended generosity to the lover she prefers, then at last M. de Plinville is ruffled. The play is rounded off by the lover producing money to redeem the estate, when, circumstances having become propitious, de Plinville considers that at any rate in this life happiness outweighs

¹ Crispin : Quoi ! tout de bon, monsieur, vous renoncez aux femmes ?

² Florimond : Dis que j'y renonçais quand mon cœur enchanté

Adorait constamment une seule beauté ;

Quand mes yeux, éblouis par un charme funeste,

Fixés sur une seule, oubliaient tout le reste :

Car je faisaïs alors injure au sexe entier.

Mais cette erreur, enfin, je prétends l'expier.

Je le déclare donc, je restitue aux belles

Un cœur qui trop longtemps fut aveugle pour elles,

Entre elles désormais je vais le partager,

Le donner, le reprendre, et jamais l'engager.

J'offensais cent beautés quand je n'en aimais qu'une !

J'en veux adorer mille, et n'en aimer aucune. . . .

Act III. sc. 12.

³ Act I. sc. 4.

³ Act III. sc. 9.

sorrow in the case of 'l'homme sensible.'¹ Here is D'Harleville's criticism of the sensibility of the age. 'L'homme sensible,' like his master Rousseau, evades and flees from facts. If in the eighteenth century the *drame* could not be at the same time strictly realist and yet teach a moral lesson, as Diderot had to admit, the man of sensibility (who is the hero of the *drame*) could only exercise his emotion and seize the happiness of life by shutting his eyes to facts. D'Harleville has thus pointed out the inconsistency in the character of the hero of the *drame* to a nation that had just begun to realise the paradox implied in this form of dramatic art. It is the answer to the position of Rousseau.

In 1791 D'Harleville gave a little one-act play, *Monsieur de Crac*, that charmed Paris even at that grave moment with its lively badinage of the Gascon's habit of exaggeration. It was not a time when anything more vital could have been put upon the stage. Two years before a five-act comedy, *Les Châteaux en Espagne*, took up again the theme of *L'Optimiste*.

M. d'Orlange is a man of dreams : and the visions which solace him have nothing to do with reality.² While the optimist insisted on looking at reality through rose-coloured glasses, M. d'Orlange sees the possibility of change for the better in every circumstance. He stays for two days in the château of M. d'Orfeuil, and immediately sees himself as the son-in-law, inheriting the land, and disposing of it

¹ '... tout chagrin qu'il est,
Peut-être il va sentir que dans la vie humaine,
Le bonheur tôt ou tard fait oublier la peine,
Qu'il n'en est que plus doux, et que l'homme de bien,
L'homme sensible, alors, peut dire : *Tout est bien.*'

Act V. sc. 13.

² 'Le pauvre paysan, sur sa bêche appuyé,
Peut se croire, un moment, seigneur de son village.
Le vieillard, oubliant les glaces de son âge,
Se figure aux genoux d'une jeune beauté ;
Et sourit ; son neveu sourit de son côté ;
En songeant qu'un matin du bonhomme il hérite ;
Telle femme se croit sultane favorite ;
Un commis est ministre ; un jeune abbé prélat ;
Le prélat. ... Il n'est pas jusqu'au simple soldat,
Qui ne se soit un jour cru Maréchal de France ;
Et le pauvre, lui-même, est riche en espérance.'

Act III. sc. 7.

according to the taste of the time. The French garden is to yield to an English garden, arranged after the model of the Queen's garden at Trianon.¹ If he is threatened with a duel he sees himself as victor, or as picturesquely wounded. When he loses Mademoiselle d'Orfeuil to the rightful lover, he constructs in imagination an equally delightful future for himself. Represented in Paris in February 1789 this play is a satiric comment on the hopeful fancy of France and her blindness to the coming horrors of revolution.

¹ 'Ces grands appartements sont vraiment détestables,
Nos bons aleux étaient des gens fort respectables,
Mais ils ne savaient pas distribuer jadis.
Dans cette pièce, moi, je vous en ferai dire.
Passons dans le jardin : car c'est là que je brille.
Je fais ôter d'abord cette triste charmille ...
Quoi ! Je fais tout ôter. Nous avons du terrain !
Voilà tout ce qu'il faut pour créer un jardin.
J'en ai fait vingt : ils sont tous dans mon portefeuille.
Entre mille sentiers bordés de chèvrefeuille,
Il en est un bien sombre : on n'y voit rien du tout ;
Et l'on est étonné, quand on arrive au bout,
De voir ... Qu'y verra-t-on ? un Amour, un vieux temple,
Un kiosque ! Oh ! non, rien d'étonnant ; par exemple
Un petit pavillon, au dehors tout uni,
Plus modeste en dedans, le luxe en est banni.
On gâte la nature, et moi je la respecte.
Du pavillon, moi seul, je serai l'architecte.
Je serai jardinier aussi : je planterai
Des arbrisseaux, des fleurs : je les arroserai
Car j'aurai sous ma main une source d'eau pure,
Et tout autour de moi la plus belle verdure !
De ce lieu tout mortel est d'avance exilé :
Mon beau-père et ma femme en auront seuls la clé.'

Les Châteaux en Espagne, Act IV. sc. 2.

In this passage there are allusions to the 'petits appartements,' the 'charmilles,' of the old botanic garden which the Queen had had removed ; the high ground on the 'rocher,' the winding paths, the dark grotto ; the 'Temple d'Amour,' containing the Cupid of Bouchardon, the smaller 'kiosque,' the walled 'Belvédère,' the 'Salon frais.' Andrieux, D'Harleville's friend, in his *Notice sur la vie et les ouvrages de Collin-Harleville*, prefacing the latter's collected works, points out the connection of this play, *Les Châteaux en Espagne*, with the earlier one, *L'Optimiste*, and shows that the plot of the former was disclosed to him by D'Harleville on the way to Versailles. 'L'Optimiste fut, comme de raison, joué à Versailles. Nous allâmes voir cette représentation, Collin et moi, dans une petite voiture, et ce fut pendant ce voyage qu'il me parla pour la première fois des *Châteaux en Espagne*, dont il avoit tout nouvellement conçu l'idée et commencé à tracer le plan' (Ed. 1821, p. xli).

M. d'Orlange is even more dense than the philosophical optimist.

D'Harleville succumbed to illness in the summer of 1789, but wrote when in bed the play *Le Vieux Célibataire*, which his contemporaries greatly enjoyed, and which differed from his other plays in the improved characterisation of the individuals in the drama. The actual production of the play was put off by the events of 1790 and the formation of the local *gardes nationales* in which project D'Harleville took an effective part. Though the plot of the play is not interesting (the old bachelor is a prey to his valet and to an intriguing housekeeper, who keep out the nephew from his rights), it reflects the desire of France at the time that riches should be distributed in order to 'faire un sort' for the poor, and that men should fulfil every function of the life of a citizen, including marriage and the education of children. The dialogue is well written and expresses very subtly the mixture of real affection and self-interest in the minds of Dubriage's servants, and the gradual increase of their selfishness and evil-doing. Dubriage is represented as sinning through weakness. Too easily touched by feeling, he loses will-power and reasoning faculties. The dangers awaiting 'l'homme sensible' are here too very clearly expressed.

Les Mœurs du jour, first acted in 1800, is interesting in its *mise-en-scène*. The costumes on the boards have to be exactly up to date, and the whole action passes in one room. The same applies to the first two acts of *Malice pour malice*, 'représentée pour la première fois sur le théâtre Louvois le 18 pluviôse an XI (1803).' *Les Mœurs du jour* describes the desire for a simple and natural life as opposed to the artificial one of Paris : but the audience to whom Fromont speaks consider his ideal as already an antiquated one.¹ They are full of social ambition, impatience of

¹ 'Peu connue au dehors, même du voisinage,
La femme vit, se plaît au sein de son ménage,
Soigne, instruit, et gâment, l'enfant qu'elle a nourri,
Trouve tout naturel d'honorer son mari.
Tour à tour promenade, ou spectacle, ou lecture,
On n'est blasé sur rien ; c'est partout la nature.'

Act II. sc. 11.

D

ties,¹ eagerness to make money, the whole veiled with unreal sentiment.² *Malice pour malice* is also a satire on the malicious misunderstandings in a small society : and ends with a plea for tolerance :

‘ Oui, soyons désormais l’un pour l’autre indulgents ;
Vivons entre nous tous comme de bonnes gens ;
Et que notre gaîté, toujours naïve et franche,
Ne blesse plus, pas même en prenant sa revanche.’³

In the history of French comedy in the eighteenth century these plays of D’Harleville, though not first-rate in any sense, are not the least interesting, because they show the criticism of average opinion on the life reflected in the drama, and on the art that would arbitrarily turn out satire from the stage and only give a shadowy unreal picture of life. D’Harleville’s puppets are mainly of the old historic type, their characters are fixed, and they have a certain part to play in the drama. But because D’Harleville, who sets them in motion, has powers of observation and also of invention, he makes a most ingenious attempt at producing comedy that is gay and rational and includes a criticism of human nature as well as of the small foibles of his day.⁴ Just as Mercier’s plays are evidence that the dramatist could not banish romance from the *drame*, so D’Harleville’s show us that the writer of comedies must use satire, and employ it like Molière as a moral corrective of society. Since the criticism of life expressed by French art always implies morality in the largest sense, there is room on the French stage alike for comedy, *drame*, and tragedy ; for morals can be influenced both by a satirical

¹ *Madame Derbin* : Nous avons le divorce.

M. Basset : Et rien n'est plus commode.

Act II. sc. 11.

² Act IV. sc. 11.

³ Act III. sc. 9.

⁴ Other comedies of D’Harleville’s are, *Le Vieillard et les jeunes gens* (1803), *Il veut tout faire*, *Les Riches*, *M. Belmont*, *Les Querelles des deux frères* (the last posthumous).

description of real life and by an imaginative description of ideal conditions.

The same general character as in D'Harleville's work is noticeable in the drama of François G. J. S. Andrieux (1759–1833), whose first play, *Anaximandre*, was written at the *procureur's* desk, and represented in 1782. Andrieux found his natural vein in the little comedy *Les Étourdis* (1787). In his preface he explains that he was a friend of Collin d'Harleville, and owed to the latter the line which happily brought about the *dénouement* of his play.¹ As was the case with D'Harleville, Andrieux depended on lively and telling dialogue for the success of his play (which was written in verse), but there are also character-drawing and character-development which give Andrieux a place in the new school of writers of comedy who attend to the psychology of their characters. This may account, too, for the popularity of Andrieux's plays in England as well as in France. The comedy had learnt from the *drame* the use of emotional situations and their effect on the personages of drama.² On the background thus marked out, Andrieux developed the humorous side of the play. In *Les Étourdis* D'Aiglemont borrows money from Folleville, who has raised it by representing to D'Aiglemont's uncle that his nephew is dead and has had an expensive funeral. The situation dawns gradually on the nephew, and then has to be revealed to the uncle. As in other plays of the period extravagance and dishonesty in the matter of money are the chief social evils blamed ; and scorn is poured on the usurers who lend themselves to the corruption of society.³ The comic love scenes between L'Hôtesse and Deschamps are meant to

¹ D'Harleville visualised the last scene, in which the nephew of D'Aiglemont (*le mort supposé*) is hidden in the cabinet, but his uncle is beginning to forgive the deceit which has been practised on him. D'Harleville then, in the character of the uncle, rapped out the line : 'Mais qu'on le voie au moins, s'il veut qu'on lui pardonne.'

² As Molé the actor said of D'Harleville's plays, he found there 'quelque pâture pour le cœur.'

³ Act III. sc. 3, 4.

bring out the self-seeking of the latter,¹ in contrast to the real love which Julie and the younger D'Aiglemont show to each other. Andrieux manages to work up this treatment of two planes of interest, the satirical and the emotional, into a well-constructed play. In 1802 he wrote a one-act drama, *Helvétius, ou La Vengeance d'un Sage*, which is chiefly valuable as showing Andrieux's method. In his preface he shows us what traits in the comedy are taken from the authentic life of Helvetius and what parts of the play are imagined, in order to bring out a main idea of general value, namely, that a person should be judged by his actions, which really disclose the man, rather than by the opinions attributed to him.² Andrieux, like Regnard at an earlier time, writes in one or three acts, according to the space required for developing the intrigue.

The preface to Andrieux's edition of *La Suite du Menteur* is interesting as reflecting the tone of the play-going public in Paris in 1803. After the shock of the Revolution there was a strong desire on the part of a little group of authors to return to the ancient satiric comedy, the gay criticism of vice and folly, which characterised Molière, and in a lesser degree Regnard. But the authors were held back by a certain insincerity in their audience, which restrained a

¹ *Deschamps :* nous ferons un ménage si doux,
Que dans votre maison ... La maison est à vous,
N'est-ce pas ?

L'Hôtesse : Oui, vraiment !

Deschamps : Ah ! vous êtes charmante.
Je crois qu'elle vaut bien vingt mille francs ?

L'Hôtesse : Oh ! trente,
Tout au moins.

Deschamps : Les beaux yeux ! Qu'ils sont vifs et perçans.
L'Hôtesse : Vous me flattez ...

Deschamps : Qui ? moi ? Je dis ce que je sens.
Votre mobilier paraît considérable ?

L'Hôtesse : Il vaut dix mille francs.

Deschamps : Vous êtes adorable ! etc.

Act I. sc. 2.

² *Préface de Helvétius.* 'Je me suis proposé un but qui me semble raisonnable ; c'est de montrer qu'il ne faut pas juger les hommes d'après quelques opinions spéculatives, qu'il ne faut pas surtout les mépriser et les haïr pour ces opinions, lorsqu'on leur voit faire des actions pour lesquelles on est obligé de les respecter et de les aimer.'

natural feeling and demanded on the stage an artificial propriety and even a prudery which the society of that date cultivated to cover up the organised licence of the First Empire. There was, too, an effort to recover the dignity and outer decorum of an aristocratic society that had passed away, and as Andrieux observes, the effort to keep up dignity kills spontaneous gaiety.¹ At the same time he observes that the old stage expedients, substitutions of one paper for another, exits and entrances without sufficient motive, would now be received impatiently, the *drame* has taught the play-going public that probability should be considered in a play, and that comedy as a criticism of society should deal with a present condition of life, and not with one which has ceased to affect the feeling of the time. Thus comedy should admit every type of subject and should be elastic in its methods.² In practice Andrieux carried out this theory, and his success in combining new and old methods is perhaps due to the fact that, unlike the authors of *drame*, he had a real appreciation of classical comedy—though it is unfortunate that he showed this by trying to introduce an adapted comedy of Corneille's on the French stage—and by writing another reconstruction of the life of Molière for the theatre.³ In *Le Trésor* (1807) he took the idea of the play from a comedy of Plautus, and worked it up in imitation of Molière's *L'Avare*. But the characters and the setting are contemporary, and are realistically described. The same applies to Andrieux's other plays: they are a picture of society of the date of the representation of the play, and thus have an interest which is more permanent than the borrowed plot. *Le Vieux Fat* (1810) has a dramatic

¹ *Préface de la Suite du Menteur de P. Corneille, avec des Changements, etc.*, 1803. ‘A voir la manière dont les comédies nouvelles sont écoutées au Théâtre Français, il semble que les spectateurs s'y tiennent en garde contre la surprise du plaisir qu'ils pourraient avoir; il semble qu'ils ne veuillent permettre à l'auteur de les faire rire qu'avec mesure et dignité ... Mais la dignité amène la gravité avec elle et tue la gaîté et le rire.’

² ‘La comédie doit éprouver, par l'effet du temps, plus de variations que la tragédie, car la comédie doit être un tableau fidèle de la société, or la société change, et le tableau, pour être toujours ressemblant, doit changer comme le modèle.’

³ *Molière avec ses amis, ou La Soirée d'Auteuil*, 1804.

prologue instead of a preface, in which, in the manner of G. B. Shaw, the author gets in a hit at possible criticisms before the critics can say a word. Of *La Comédienne* Andrieux had a private representation in 1812 before the public one in 1816, but he found that his classical notion of comedy was diverging further and further from the self-conscious moral theory of that date. His opportunity came when Picard opened the *Théâtre Royal de l'Odéon* in 1816 : and Andrieux was asked to write the prologue. From this time onwards he wrote plays for the theatre imitated from the English (*La Jeune Créoile*, *Lénore*), stories, and fugitive verse ; but he gave up the *genre* for which he was especially fitted, and yielded to the taste of the time for romantic sentiment. The unities give place to irregularity of construction. Jane Shore, in the later play, is endowed with the more harmonious name of Lénore, with its German associations. Finally Andrieux wrote a poem describing Charlotte at the tomb of Werther reading Ossian and weeping over his urn, a poem which marks his sympathy with the models of the early nineteenth century.¹ His part in the eighteenth-century drama is then confined to the plays written before 1816.

After 1789 comedy written in verse according to the pattern of seventeenth-century drama was thus only kept alive by the efforts of D'Harleville and Andrieux, who by a judicious use of satire and of emotional situations managed to keep the interest of an audience otherwise impatient of the manner of old French comedy.² An author of the transition period between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, L. B. Picard (1769–1828), used prose for his

¹ ‘Je viens nourrir ma tristesse
Aux lieux où tu te plaisais,
Je porte avec moi sans cesse
Le livre que tu laissas.
Il redoublait tes alarmes ;
Il augmente mes douleurs ;
Tu le mouillas de tes larmes ;
Je l'arrosoe de mes pleurs.’

² Both D'Harleville and Andrieux trace the origin of their plays to single maxims derived from Boileau or other moralists of the seventeenth century.

comedies, except when writing *opéra-comique*. In Picard's plays we see Beaumarchais' prophecy of the continued corruption of society amply fulfilled. The classes which after the Revolution had displaced the *ancien régime* had inherited the vices without the heroism of the *noblesse*. At the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth the characteristics of society were the love of money and ease which succeeded to the terror of revolution, political intrigues which contributed to the instability of the state, the desire to snatch personal advantage in the general loss of social equilibrium, and these were the aspects of French life which Picard seized and painted. He brings out, too, the degradation of provincial life and manners. The same low motives are to be found there as in Paris, but exercised for poorer aims.¹ Each comedy of Picard's has its *thèse* of this kind ; and he gets his effects by bringing together in one place and in connexion with the plot many indications of the type of spirit which he is criticising. So the visitors to *La Petite Ville* find themselves involved in every possible scandal and intrigue.² Picard cannot abstain from direct moral influence and interference ; for the lesson is not only declared by the plot but enforced by the long speeches of the characters, full of just observation. The keenness of his satire on present conditions was, however, accompanied by an enthusiastic belief in the future of democracy. In 1791 the three-act play *Le Passé, le Présent, l'Avenir*, affirmed the strong faith of the author in the political and social Utopia which France was to disclose to the world in 1820. The valet in this play (also in a story, *Le Gil-Blas de la Révolution*) is a creation. Deschamps is an opportunist in the first play, and becomes the hero of a novel in the second. In *Les Marionnettes*, Dumont, the

¹ See *La Petite Ville*, Act I. sc. 3. ‘Les vices y sont les mêmes et d'autant plus misérables qu'ils s'exercent sur de plus minces sujets. Je n'y connais personne, je n'y suis jamais entré ; mais il me semble voir d'ici la morgue des hommes, les prétentions des femmes, les haines des familles, le regret de ne pas être à Paris, les petites ambitions, les grandes querelles sur des riens, la coquetterie des petites filles, l'esprit sordide et mesquin dans l'intérieur des ménages, le faste ridicule et de mauvais goût dans les repas priés.’

² Cf. the modern adaptation of this play as *Die lustige Witwe*.

valet, is transferred from one master to another, and this is merely a sign of the sudden changes of fortune which are part of the uncertainty of life as represented in these plays. It is true that the rich inheritance falls in the end to the deserving and ingenuous Georgette, and thus gains her the husband she desires, but it is clear that fortune, and not love, is the key of the situation.

Gaspard, the maker of marionnettes, sums up the effect of chance events on human beings, who are little better themselves than the wooden figures obedient to the hand that governs them :

'Tu le vois, mon ami, nous sommes les très humbles serviteurs de nos passions, qui elles-mêmes obéissent aux événements. Un sourire de bienveillance que je n'attendais pas, la distraction de celui que je saluais, mille accidents graves ou puérils, vont influer d'une manière si forte sur moi, sur mon voisin, sur la femme que j'aime, qu'en un instant ils auront varié à l'infini notre humeur, notre conduite, nos projets ... Quand je te disais que nous sommes tous des marionnettes.'¹

Part of Picard's success was no doubt due to the fact that he was not only a critic of life, but that he seized the right moment for the particular vein of criticism that he exercised. In the terrible years 1792–1793 his pieces were light and amusing and raised none of the problems that were exasperating the minds of his audience. His plays were merely a recreation. But in 1794, with the help of Duval, he put on the stage of the Opéra-Comique an imitation of Voltaire's *Zadig*.² The recovery of Toulon from the English was celebrated by Picard in *La Prise de Toulon*. Where Picard criticised the conditions of the day too closely for the public patience, as in *Les Suspects*³ and *La Perruque Blonde*, ill-success was the result. His imitations in verse of Rousseau's theories were not very successful plays,⁴ and in *Les Conjectures* he dealt to the dissatisfaction of the public with the case of an unmarried mother. From 1797 onwards, however, he gauged the taste of the time completely.

¹ *Les Marionnettes*, Act V. sc. 8.

² 1793.

³ *Andros, ou les François à Bassora*.

⁴ *Les Amis de Collège, ou L'Homme oisif et artisan*.

Médiocre et Rampant was another comedy which satirised the social chaos and complicated motives of the time. It provoked criticism. ‘Le lieu de la pièce est presque toujours un mauvais lieu.’ The next plays were more light and amusing—*Les Voisins*, *Le Collatéral*, *Les Trois Maris*: although the latter again was attacked by the pretentious virtue of 1802 as bearing too hardly on the bourgeois class of the day.¹ The Government itself was too insecure to bear the shadow of satire. In *Duhautcours* Picard attacked the dishonesty of bankruptcy. From 1804 onwards, protected by the Empire, a series of plays were performed, including *Les Marionnettes*, *Les Ricochets*, and *Les Deux Philiberts*, which, though on familiar themes, had much vivacity and painted in every case a condition of society as well as individual character. With Picard, however, the eighteenth century is really at an end. The careful directions about scenery, the almost complete use of prose, the tendency to develop at times into comic opera, melodrama, or the historical play, all this marks the new era.

At the end of the eighteenth century the way was open for every kind of new play. Precedents had been set for realistic drama, problem plays, plays with a purpose, well-constructed plays, romantic drama. It was left to the new generation to see how its energy would develop these *genres* still further. The methods of Alfred de Musset, Victor Hugo, Dumas fils, Augier, Scribe, Sardou, had been to some extent anticipated in this century of many experiments. And one kind of play, the play with the double intention of moving the audience and exhorting them to virtue, was going the round of other European countries in the form of translations and adaptations between 1790 and 1830, and giving them the point of view of France towards the end of the eighteenth century, her unpractical optimism and her impatience of the past, just when France herself in the beginning of the nineteenth century was about to recover her native tendency to satire and to romance,

¹ So Geoffroy criticised Picard's *La Grande Ville, ou Les Provinciaux à Paris*. ‘Le comique est naturel, mais pas assez saisissant, et pas assez noble pour le goût actuel.’

her sense that morality in art does not need the emphasis of a sermon, and of a unity in life which includes the past and the present in one continuous development.

The evolution of the *drame*, with its double effect on realism and the teaching of a moral lesson, is the subject of the next chapter.

Note.—During the eighteenth century, while comedy as played in the theatres was becoming gradually subject to the influence of *drame*, the old French farce survived for a time (up to 1756) in the form of the *Parade*, a farcical play suited to representation on a long and narrow balcony. The traditional place in which these plays were acted was on the balcony overlooking the courtyard of the Foire St. Germain: when the site was built over, the *Parades* came to an end, but the plots were printed in the *Théâtre des Boulevards, ou Recueil des Parades* (1756) from which the following account is taken :

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‘ Cette espèce de farce ou de prologue ayant été bannie avec raison des Théâtres de Paris, les acteurs Forains l’ont conservée, mais d’une autre façon ; car pour attirer le peuple dans leurs tripots, ils paroisoient sur un balcon très étroit et le plus long qu’il leur étoit possible, et c’est là qu’ils jouoient des farces de tête sur des plans qu’ils en avoient conservés par tradition, ou qu’ils avoient eux-mêmes composées.

‘ Voilà, Madame, ce qui véritablement porte le nom de Parade ; mais aujourd’hui ce grand Spectacle ne subsiste plus à Paris. Les bâtiments que l’on a faits dans la cour de la Foire St. Germain, et que l’on appelloit le préau, ont occupé le terrain des loges de ces baladins, et par conséquent il n’en reste aujourd’hui que le souvenir dans la tête de ceux, qui capables de saisir le ridicule et d’en profiter partout où ils se trouvent, ont séjouvé du mauvais langage, de la fausse prononciation, et cependant affectée, des caractères d’amoureux, et de la confiance de ces malheureux acteurs, aussi bien de la sécurité avec laquelle ils débitoient des choses éloignées de toute sorte de vraisemblance.’¹

¹ *Lettre à Madame ... Vol. ii., Théâtre des Boulevards.*

they were. Where romance was discovered, it was to be within simple and obscure lives ; where satire was exercised, it was by the opposition implied between the simplicity of middle-class life and the luxury, affectation and arrogance of the classes in power. A few dramatists consciously followed in the footsteps of Racine, and produced romantic drama of an exaggerated nature, such as Cr  billon’s ; others, followers of Moli  re, satirised society directly, as did Regnard : but these *genres* were less vigorous than the *drame* and had fewer national and living elements in them than the long series of *pi  ces s  rieuses*, named later *drames*.¹

Various strands of thought and political events had combined to give this characteristic turn to eighteenth-century drama. France was moving towards a view of democracy which was to control her development through the Revolution of 1789. This was the view that an artificial equality among men should be built up. France has always been prompt at putting her theories into practice ; and in the eighteenth century this desire to level all distinctions was one that found its expression both in politics and in literature. Thus the commonplace acts of an everyday life were considered to be sufficiently interesting for the stage. Humanity was reduced to its least common denominator, and the dramatist only cared to excite interest in his hero in virtue of the humanity in which he shared. The writer of plays was moved by a desire to appreciate the common means and common ends of life. The theory of the simple life, practised, as memoirs of the time inform us, long before Rousseau stated it, induced an attention to the life of the masses who observed the law of a simple life from necessity rather than from choice, and their action was considered

¹ See Grimm, *Corr. Litt.*, 1754, pp. 127, 8 : ‘ Le sublime Moli  re n’avait peint dans ses pi  ces que les ridicules. Ses successeurs sont venus ; ils ont voulu nous attendrir, nous int  resser, nous faire pleurer m  me dans leurs com  dies ; mais comme ils n’avaient ni le g  nie ni le pinceau de Moli  re, comme ils ne savaient pas les routes de notre c  ur comme lui, et que cependant ils n’『taient pas d  pourvus de talent au point de ne m  riter aucun succ  s, on a confondu le genre et les auteurs, et on a mis sur le compte de l’un ce qui ´tait la faute des autres. Mais, de tous ces reproches, il n’y en a aucun qui tombe sur le genre.’

by the philosophers as none the less estimable and valuable. Virtue was held to consist in the fulfilment of the daily round and common task : great renunciations and tragic actions of any size or intensity had had their day in the seventeenth century, and were considered out of place in the eighteenth. For the eighteenth century, revolting as it did against the privileges of birth and station, desired to show—not indeed with Molière, that the ambitious *bourgeois*, so far as he was pretentious and arrogant, failed to conform to an ideal of life—but that if the *bourgeois* would be content to remain in his station he would be worthy of the admiration and attention which had hitherto been focussed on men of more brilliant careers and more elevated sentiments. The people desired to increase their own self-respect, and they placed their pride in an assurance of 'Respectability,' 'Worth,' and 'Candour' rather than in that of personal or social distinction. The social life which expressed itself in this drama was in direct antagonism to the centralisation of the court and society at Versailles : and it ignored class distinctions as such. The dramatist, too, constantly appealed to the concrete fact, and limited to this his perception of truth. Thus the subtle if not unreal emotions aroused in an artificial state of society were to be displaced by the sight of real indigence and misfortune, and by the simple joys of family and of country life. The virtue of the heroes of the new drama would be only relative, but none the less exciting to admiration. The misfortunes were to be usual, but none the less disposing to compassion. It was obvious that in these conditions the measure of judgment used would be a material and physical rather than a mental and moral one. The term 'real' was given only one, and that its most ordinary, meaning.

In these conditions it is evident that the drama had two tendencies which often conflicted with each other : there was the tendency to an exact description of the simpler classes of society, which would lead straight to realism ; there was the tendency to represent them as worthier than the upper stratum with which they were contrasted : this would lead to a didactic treatment in a play. As a matter

of fact the larger number of *drames* hesitate between these two categories : and the natural issues of the plot are perpetually confused by its didactic purpose. Many characters only gain relief in the picture by being opposed to the author's black sheep : and thus dramatic values are blurred ; and the realistic tendency is not allowed to control the plot.¹ It does, however, control the *mise-en-scène*. The valets gradually disappear from the eighteenth-century stage because they no longer affect the action of modern life :

'Les Daves ont été les pivots de la comédie ancienne parce qu'ils étaient, en effet, les moteurs de tous les troubles domestiques. Sont-ce les mœurs qu'on avait il y a deux mille ans ou les nôtres qu'il faut imiter ?'²

They will stay in the *antichambre*.

The actors will no longer declaim in a rigid row, but will move about naturally on the stage, throw themselves on sofas, or into one another's arms. Conversation will also be natural, gesture of considerable use, expression of eyes be made to tell, and silence play its part.³ Nor will the actors speak only to the *parterre* as at the Comédie française.⁴ Scenery was to be realistic and dress not a parade, but in conformity both with the suggested time of the play and the *rôles* played by the characters.⁵

The appeal to sensibility and the absence of humour in the *drame* also have their root in the life of the time. To some extent the drama owed this quality to the romances so

¹ See, for example, the type of drama produced about 1770. 'La Vraie Mère, drame didactico-comique en trois actes et en prose,' of which Grimm says (vii. 243) : 'C'est un étrange vertige que celui de Mde. Moissy de nous accabler de drames moraux écrits dans le genre ennuyeux pour le progrès des bonnes mœurs et pour le dessèchement des lecteurs.'

² Diderot, *Premier Entretien sur le Fils Naturel*, vii. 90.

³ Diderot, *Premier Entretien*, 95. *Seconde Entretien*, 104, 105.

⁴ *De la Poésie dramatique*, p. 378.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 374, 376. Such changes in the direction of realism, as stated by Diderot and others, find a curious parallel in the history of Greek comedy in the time of Menander. Realism of presentation entered in, and every point gained seemed an advance for the drama, and yet the drama declined, and the plots suffered for want of natural force. See *English Literature and the Classics*, article 'Greek and English Tragedy,' by Professor Murray, pp. 23-24.

generally read in the eighteenth century. From *Télémaque* to *Manon Lescaut* the feeling was for the pathetic in the romance of life. Beaumarchais in the preface to *Eugénie* works out the psychology of this appeal. What is the use of a classical play ? he says : what morality can it induce ? For morality is a personal application of the thoughts produced in our minds by an event. The classical play does not help in this. What is the use of a comedy ? It is of very little use as a scourge of vice. But serious drama is of use. It places us in a real relation to the events on the stage :

‘Leurs traverses nous sont un objet de réflexion, une occasion de retour sur nous-mêmes.’¹

If we suffer, we gain consolation ; if we are happy ‘alors nous exercerons délicieusement notre sensibilité, nous ferons l’épreuve de notre faculté de bienveillance.’ The pathetic then becomes ‘useful,’ and as such is justified by writers of the eighteenth century.

The subjects which were chosen by dramatists during the second half of the eighteenth century, for example *Le Père de famille* of Diderot and the *Eugénie* of Beaumarchais, are subjects which announce in practice the popular taste. The suffering of innocent people, benevolence exercised towards them by the good, or reparation made by the bad—this simple list of events roughly covers all the stories put upon the stage in the *drame* of the eighteenth century.

- ✓ The moral teaching of the play was then greatly emphasised. The Church was no longer, as in the seventeenth century, the censor of morals, and lay writers had taken up the task. Their reasons for considering the stage a peculiarly suitable vehicle for the teaching of morality are explained by all dramatic critics in the century. Voltaire, Sébastien Mercier, Grimm, and Diderot have the most complete theories on the subject, which the opposition of Rousseau only served to strengthen. Grimm went so far as to hope that the statesmen of the new era would include poets who would have had their characters formed by that

¹ See Béclard, *Sébastien Mercier*, p. 168.

excellent moral institution, the stage. The drama would then fulfil all the State obligations for educating its citizens in the ways of public morality :

‘Alors les théâtres deviendront un cours d’institutions politiques et morales, et les poètes ne seront plus seulement des hommes de génie, mais des hommes d’état.’¹

The dramatists expressed in their prefaces the same desire to be useful to society through inculcating virtue. So Destouches explains his aim in his preface to the *Curieux Impertinent* :

... ‘de corriger les mœurs, de tomber sur le ridicule, — de décrier le vice; et de mettre la vertu dans un si beau jour qu’elle s’attire l’estime et la vénération publiques.’

Mercier, dramatist and theorist, was ‘échauffé par le désir de donner un drame utile.’²

Comedy, thought Diderot, should give men a taste for duty :

‘Dans ces jours solennels, on représentera une belle tragédie qui apprenne aux hommes à redouter les passions ; une bonne comédie qui les instruise de leurs devoirs et qui leur en inspire le goût.’³

The social ideal expressed in the *drame* is not new. It is found in all French literature since France became a nation, and is merely moulded from time to time to suit the freshness of new circumstances. Expressed in their different ways by Corneille, Molière, and Racine, it is shown in the eighteenth century not only by the writers of *drame*, but also by the continuators of Racine’s and of Molière’s tradition. For instance, the Abbé Genest, one of Racine’s imitators in the eighteenth century, who gave to the ancient plots a more modern setting, expressed in the *Préface de Pénélope* (1722) the social aim of the stage :

‘Mon sujet m’a fourni l’idée de toutes les vertus qui sont l’âme de la société civile, les devoirs d’un fidèle sujet envers son roi, d’une illustre femme envers son mari, d’un fils généreux envers son père.’

¹ Grimm, *Corr. Litt.* viii. 80.

² *Préface de Jenneauval.*

³ *2e Entretien*, 108, 109.

The characters in this play act and speak with the ordinary manner and ways of thought of the later seventeenth century.

The *drame*, then, was the expression of a political ideal. It was moral and social in its tendency. It claimed to appeal to sensibility and to avoid satire, and to see only the romance of the simple life. But it claimed also to be a true picture of real circumstances.

The imitation of nature in the drama was of course no new thing. Brunetière, in his essay on 'Le Naturalisme au XVII^e siècle,' shows that realism was characteristic of the age of Louis XIV. The lines, he says, of the classical drama were large and simple and opposed to exaggeration in any direction. So the burlesque of Cyrano and of Scarron had but a short life; the language of the *précieux* school soon became a subject for irony, and the emphatic school in the drama yielded to the more natural effects obtained by Racine and Molière. The eighteenth century repeated some of the errors of the seventeenth. Thus we find examples of preciousness in Fontenelle, of the grotesque in Perrault, and of the over-emphatic school in Crébillon. But these experiments occurred comparatively early in the century, and were submerged by the great flood of scientific and critical thought that nearly extinguished the drama, and would in fact have done so had not the stage identified itself with the undercurrent of sentiment and refreshed the average mind with dramas of adventure and of rustic life. Thus we have the figures of the 'Barbier de Séville' and the 'Devin du Village' side by side with the *bourgeois* types among which they move. We have also the spectacular effects gained by the first attempt at opera,¹ and the pathetic drama which reflected the sensibility of the middle class.

The first symptom of the change was the appearance of the *comédie larmoyante*, which developed into the *drame bourgeois*. It had been foreshadowed as early as the six-

¹ From the beginning of the century pastorals and 'tragédie-opéras' were written, and from 1750 onwards rustic and comic operas appeared in quick succession, sometimes two new ones in one year. This helped to divert the taste of the nation from classical comedy.

teenth century by the tragi-comedy of Hardy, where there was an effort to paint scenes of ordinary life without much criticism or comment ; and also perhaps by Corneille's early comedies, for exactly the same reason. Corneille's tragedies, too, had something in common with the *drame*, through his desire to attain naturalness of action in them ; and had not Corneille himself said, before Diderot, that kings and princes were not the only necessary exponents of high sentiment ?¹ The primitive passion and excitement of the senses shown by the characters in Racine's tragedies were also near enough to life to ensure the interest of the *bourgeois* onlooker. Molière had admitted serious subjects into drama, as, for example, in *Tartufe* and in *Don Juan*, though he treated them in a way that disengaged the comic element. But his followers were unable to combine the sentiment for which they wished with the laughter of the comedy of manners. They fled from every temptation to satire and thus the *drame* was encouraged to the detriment of satire as it was also, in theory at any rate, to the destruction of romance.

In the development of the *drame* from the theatre of the seventeenth century, the plays of Destouches (1680–1754) supply a necessary link. This author had already stated, in the prologue to the *Curieux impertinent*, his desire to use the stage for a moral purpose. The very titles of his plays make it clear that Destouches is attempting a criticism of society : *L'Irrésolu*, *Le Philosophe marié*, *L'Ambitieux et l'Indiscret*, *Le Glorieux*, *L'Ingrat*, *L'Envieux*, *Le Dissipateur*, are examples of this. Very rarely do we find a different form, as in *Le Triple Mariage*, *L'Obstacle imprévu*, *La fausse Agnès*. What in Molière was a secondary title or explanation of the scope of a piece becomes in Destouches the principal description of it. In the definition of character, and in the names of the characters, Destouches stands between the new fashion and the old tradition. Valère is the name for a young lover and so is Cléon. These names occur in several plays, just as they did in Corneille and Molière. Oronte, Ariste, Géronte are

¹ *Épître à M. de Zuylichem.*

older men, and, as in Molière, the names of Bélide and Angélique are used for the women's parts. Nérine, as we should expect, is a *suivante*. L'Olive, La Fleur, L'Epine are names of valets, derived from Molière, but a new name is added, that of Pasquin, of Italian origin, probably derived from the Italian Pasquino, one of the makers of Pasquinades or satires at Rome. Pasquin comes in as a valet in the plays of Baron (1653–1729),¹ and when we meet him in the plays of Destouches he is a person of much wit and discretion who forces the action in the interest of the hero and heroine in the plays, and has obviously a moral end in view which prevents him from being only the valet of farce. Pasquin has a manner of uttering home-truths—a manner quite unlimited in its impertinence—which reduces the other characters to helpless silence. In *Le Triple Mariage* he rushes on the stage, uttering the huntsman's yell, and finding Nérine there he explains to her that his master is no huntsman of romance, has not even shot a sparrow, but has bought game at the poultreer's on the way.² In *L'Obstacle imprévu* the Pasquin of the play assures the lover Valère, who sees the Julie of his desire being snatched away, that his father's action shows want of sense and reason.³ On the other hand, he sees the moment when Julie cannot be won. Acute as he is, Pasquin's cleverness is counterbalanced and sometimes countermatched by that of Nérine, who in *L'Obstacle imprévu* is his wife.

In the plays of Destouches a contrast is marked between the manners of Paris and those of the provinces. Old-fashioned *bourgeois* virtues, faithfulness and domesticity are to be found in the provinces. Paris provides a 'bel air' and destroys sincerity :

¹ See also the play of Regnard and Dufresny, *Pasquin et Marforio, médecin des mœurs* (1697).

² Nérine : Que diantre veux-tu dire ?

Pasquin : Que nous ne venons point du château de Clitandre, comme nous voulons le persuader au père de mon maître. Nous n'avons été qu'à un village, à demi-lieue de Paris, et nous n'y avons pas seulement tué un moineau.—*Le Triple Mariage*, sc. 10.

³ Pasquin : Mais au fond, de quoi vous plaignez-vous ? Julie ne vous est pas destinée, et votre père n'a d'autre tort en ceci que celui d'avoir perdu le sens et la raison.—*L'Obstacle imprévu*, Act III. sc. 1.

‘Je ne suis point un mari du bel air,’ says Pasquin.
 ‘J’aime ma femme.’ ‘Elle lit depuis le matin jusqu’au
 soir et se pique de savoir tout,’ says Valère of Angélique,
 and Pasquin answers, ‘C’est un reste de province. Le
 grand monde la corrigera.’¹

The main fault which the new comedy attacks is that of pride. It is true that in *Le Glorieux* Destouches, who had visited England and been struck by the stiff coldness of the aristocratic manner there, probably forced the note and produced what to a French audience must have seemed like a caricature in the character of the Comte de Tufière, but, on the other hand, he was attempting to see the French nobility from the point of view of the middle and lower classes, an attempt which Molière had only made in certain plays, for example, in *Don Juan* and in *Georges Dandin*, and there the satire is disguised because Molière satirises other groups as well.²

The criticism of the arrogance of the Comte de Tufière is put into the mouth of Pasquin, who speaks for the whole class of valets, and points out that the man who is arrogant to his social inferiors is also difficult and conceited with his social equals. Pride, in fact, is the root of all evil, as the mediaeval theologians felt,³ and is the chief obstacle

¹ *L'Obstacle imprévu*, Act I. sc. 1.

² *Le Glorieux* was translated into English (Thos. Holcroft, Covent Garden) as *The School of Arrogance* in 1791.

³

‘Sa politique

Est d’être toujours grave avec un domestique ;
 S’il lui disait un mot il croirait s’abaisser,
 Et qu’un valet lui parle, il se fera chasser.
 Enfin pour ébaucher en deux mots sa peinture,
 C'est l'homme le plus vain qu'ait produit la nature ;
 Pour ses inférieurs plein d'un mépris choquant ;
 Avec ses égaux même il prend l'air important :
 Si fier de ses aieux, si fier de sa noblesse,
 Qu'il croit être ici-bas le seul de son espèce ;
 Persuadé d'ailleurs de son habileté,
 Et décidant sur tout avec autorité ;
 Se croyant en tout genre un mérite suprême,
 Dédaignant tout le monde, et s'admirant lui-même.
 En un mot, des mortels le plus impérieux,
 Et le plus suffisant, et le plus glorieux.’

Le Glorieux, Act I. sc. 4.

both to courtesy and to the recognition of the natural equality of man.

In *Le Glorieux* Destouches carries his thesis so far as to make it appear that the *suivante* Lisette, though of simple condition, is a good enough match for the hero, but Destouches is conventional enough as a dramatist and thinker to make her turn out to be well-born.¹

It has been noticed by Lanson² that the characters in Destouches are all self-conscious. They moralise on their own type of conduct and consciously express it. Sometimes this action is ironical, as when Nérine the *suivante* explains that she is obliged to be in love with the valet because this is 'selon les règles'; but sometimes it is a case of serious character-drawing and the characters all express the particular purpose for which they have been put upon the stage. In the first case the comedy leans to satire, in the second the inevitability of the result produces an effect of mechanism that sometimes suggests Molière without the saving humour of the great seventeenth-century writer.

According to Destouches the love of virtue was to be inculcated, but too much amusement was not to be excited in the process. There was to be

'une pure et saine morale modérément assaisonnée de bonnes plaisanteries et de quelques traits délicatement caustiques.'³

And in the prologue to *L'Ambitieux* Destouches explains that this produces what he calls noble comedy.⁴

Again in the preface to *Le Glorieux* Destouches makes it evident that the moral purpose of a play should lead to

¹ *Le Glorieux*, Act IV. sc. 3; and Act I. sc. 8.

² G. Lanson, *Nivelle de La Chaussée et la comédie larmoyante*, pp. 38, 39.

'Les personnages de Destouches sont si bien des moralistes qu'ils se détachent d'eux-mêmes, se regardent curieusement et moralisent sur leur propre rôle. Ils mettent leur caractère en maximes, et se conduisent selon les règles qu'ils en tirent.'

³ *La Force du naturel*, Préface.

⁴ 'Il traite un sujet noble, élevé, sérieux . . .
Il tâche d'égayer le sublime tragique,

Non par des traits facétieux,

Mais par ceux d'un noble comique.'

the virtuous action being put in a clear and admirable light, and that amusement was to be a secondary consideration.¹ Thus Destouches has no fear of an anti-climax. When in *Le Glorieux Lycandre* turns out to be the father of the boaster and humiliates him, finally saying :

‘Redoute mon courroux,
Ma malédiction, ou tombe à mes genoux,’²

the count gives way and says :

‘Je ne puis résister à ce ton respectable.’

The connexion between the drama of Destouches and the next stage, that of the *comédie larmoyante*, may now be more precisely stated. In 1742 Destouches, in the *Lettre sur la comédie de l'Amour usé*, was still of opinion that a play should only occasionally awaken tears, but the methods he used to impress his audience, the self-conscious pre-occupation with simple virtue which he encouraged, were just what appealed to the sensibility of an eighteenth-century playgoer. Thus it has been said that only the character of Pasquin and certain amusing situations stand between Destouches and the *comédie larmoyante*. But there is perhaps this difference between them—that in Destouches virtue comes in to show up vice, while in Nivelle de la Chaussée vice is admitted to show up virtue. Destouches is a far closer and keener critic of society than were the authors of the later serious drama. Destouches also to some extent essayed a comedy of character. So far as he did this he was anticipating the idea of Diderot, that vice or absurdity can be studied in different forms in different grades of society :

‘Un ridicule ou un vice, quoique toujours le même, prend une forme particulière dans les différentes personnes selon les rangs qu'elles occupent dans la société.’

¹ ‘J'ai toujours eu pour maxime incontestable que quelque amusante que puisse être une comédie, c'est un ouvrage imparfait, et même dangereux, si l'auteur ne s'y propose pas de corriger les mœurs, de tomber sur le ridicule, de décrier le vice, et de mettre la vertu dans un si beau jour, qu'elle attire la vénération publique.’

² *Le Glorieux*, Act V. sc. 6.

Alexis Piron (1689–1773) chose subjects for his comedies that might also be said to lead to the *comédie larmoyante*. *L'École des Pères* (1728) is an example of a comedy meant to appeal to the sentiment of the audience. But Piron himself belonged to the old school of the seventeenth century. He thought that comedies were intended to please and amuse an audience. At the same time he felt that they ought to be useful to society. Hence his attempt to mingle the useful and the agreeable, as he explains in the Préface to *L'École des Pères*. His method was to introduce some farcical or some critical element. A *soupçon* of Molière was to enter into the *drame*.

'Cette pièce,' he said of *L'École des Pères*, 'est du genre noble, et fut jouée avec le plus grand succès : le dénouement en est pathétique, mais l'auteur a introduit le rôle d'un Paysan, qui répand beaucoup de gaieté dans cette comédie.'¹ And again, 'Le but de la comédie fut toujours d'inspirer le plaisir et la gaieté, loin de faire naître l'horreur et la pitié. Elle ne doit donc offrir sur la scène que de riantes peintures de ridicules ...'²

Side by side, therefore, with the touching sight of the father ill-treated by the ungrateful sons, Piron puts the picture of the peasant father, naïvely indignant at the impertinence of his son Pasquin. The father supplies the farcical element ; Pasquin, as his name implies, the critical one.³

Both elements take away from the *larmoyant* character of the play. Pasquin brings in a political tendency which is not without importance, while Piron shows his traditional prejudice in making Pasquin boast—untruthfully—that he is really of good birth though serving as a lackey. In Act I. sc. 6, Pasquin declares himself to Nérine :

¹ P. 52, ed. of 1775.

² P. 63.

³ That the names of Pasquino and Marforio, the satirist and the questioner of Roman university tradition, had a definite connotation on the French stage is proved by the use of the name Marphurius for the questioning philosopher in Molière, and the entrance of the name Pasquin into literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in France, when 'Le Pasquin de la troupe' became a general expression. In 1697 Regnard and Dufresny produced *Pasquin et Marforio médecin des mœurs*.

' J'ai, par libertinage, endossé la mandille,
 Mais je n'en suis pas moins un enfant de famille,
 D'un riche Procureur l'héritier et l'aîné :
 Et l'on se sent toujours, tiens, de ce qu'on est né.'

When Nérine objects :

' Fils d'un père opulent, honnête homme peut-être,
 S'abaisser à servir ! Vivre aux gages d'un maître !
 Quelle honte ! '

Pasquin replies :

' Oh que non ! J'ai consulté le cas :
 Pour être un peu laquais, on ne déroge pas.'

Pasquin has no difficulty in moralising over the ungrateful sons, though he himself has overstated his social position and been ashamed of his peasant father.

' On tient mes garnemens, et je te venge enfin,
 Pauvre père, aveuglé si longtemps sur leur compte !
 Puissent-ils en crever de dépit et de honte.'¹

When the action is at the crisis, Pasquin, confronted with his peasant father, says that he has denied his origin merely from humility. On this tone the play ends as far as Pasquin is concerned :

' Ma foi, non ! maintenant, je pense, en vérité
 Que ce que j'en ai dit, c'est par humilité.'²

But Angélique, who wishes to succour the deserted and deceived father, brings the moral out relentlessly :

' Je ne vous parle plus, que devant ces barbares.
 Par une offre si juste, et des refus si rares,
 Inspirons, ou du moins faisons leur concevoir
 Vous, le mépris des biens, moi, l'amour du devoir.
 Réduisons aux remords l'avarice inhumaine,
 J'attends qu'ici bientôt l'intérêt les ramène.'³

Angélique, in fact, must have an audience for her sermon among the characters in the play, in order that the moral may strike the real audience with more effect : they see

¹ *L'Ecole des Pères*, Act V. sc. 3.

² *Ibid.* Act V. sc. 5.

³ *Ibid.* Act V. sc. 6.

the object-lesson and have it commented upon, they can hardly go wrong.

Piron, writer of tragedies, comedies, farces, odes sacred and secular, used on the whole the traditional methods for his plays and the conventional names for his characters. But he has given us certain personal studies of eccentric characters in which, as in the plays of Diderot, we can trace the writer's confession of his own personality.

Gresset (1709–1777) was also conventional and seems to have repeated in his own person the experience of the sixteenth-century dramatist—that is, he wrote for a literary circle and only reflected in his plays the small stratum of society that would appeal to it. In character-drawing he was very successful, and his comedies on the classical pattern mark an advance in characterisation. In the development of the *comédie larmoyante*, however, Gresset plays but a small part. Like Piron and Destouches, he uses the virtuous characters to show up the vice of the unsympathetic ones. As with all French writers of comedies the vice he attacks is a social vice. The play depends for its interest on the delineation of character rather than on plot or intrigue. In *Le Méchant*, for example, he shows the harm done to society by the cold malice of the central character. The crisis of the play, when Cléon is driven out but threatens the household which has sheltered and now rejects him, foreshadows the modern problem play and escapes from classical procedure. The piece ends on a note of tension—the expulsion of Cléon has not destroyed the evil that he has done. Thus Gresset's chief comedy teaches a moral lesson through the plot and not through the speech of any individual character. It is more realistic than didactic, and more successful in its genuine moral influence and also in its construction than the regular *drame*.

But Gresset, in his revival of the Eclogue and the Ode, expressed the desire for the simple life which is so characteristic of his time. The *Épître à M. Gresset* explains the view of the anonymous writer¹ that Gresset was aiming,

¹ Now known to be M. Sélis, professeur à Amiens (on the authority of Grimm, *Corr. Litt.*, vol. iii. p. 90).

not at the heights of Parnassus, but at a peaceful spot sacred to Pastorals.

‘ On craint dans ce réduit paisible
 Le merveilleux et le terrible.
 La nature en fait les honneurs,
 L’Art y vient rendre son hommage,
 Mais c’est dans le simple équipage
 D’un Berger couronné de fleurs.
 On y préfère un Paisage
 Rendu d’après le naturel,
 Au pinceau, quoique docte et sage
 De Rubens et de Raphaël.
 La voix d’une aimable Bergère,
 Unie au son d’un Chalumeau,
 Y touche l’âme de manière
 A nous faire oublier Rameau.’

In his imitation of nature Gresset was considered by his contemporaries to have abandoned classical tradition ; and just as the scenes of Piron’s pastorals read like drawing-room dialogues between the lady, the lover, and the bore, even though the first two may be called Thémire and Sylvandre, and the last Hylas, so the tragedy of Gresset named *Édouard III* is the expression of a moral and sentimental drama, quite *bourgeois* in its moral teaching and self-conscious in its phrases. Very little attempt is made to keep the historical names of the personages except in ‘*Édouard*’ and ‘*Vorcestre*’ and ‘*Arondel*.’ ‘*Eugénie*’ and ‘*Ismène*’ suggest the atmosphere of the piece, and in the last scene *Eugénie* dies, expressing her love for *Edouard*.

‘ Pardonnez, O mon Père, aux feux que je déplore,
 Ils seroient ignorés si je vivois encore . . .
 Oui, le ciel, l’un pour l’autre, avoit formé nos cœurs :
 Prince . . . je vous aimois . . . je vous aime . . . je
 meurs.’¹

Sometimes the phrases are lightened in Gresset by a generalisation that suggests the great days of the drama. So *Vorcestre* says

¹ *Edouard III*, Act V. sc. 13.

'Un lâche, au gré des tems, varie et se dément,
Mais l'honneur se ressemble, et n'a qu'un sentiment.'¹

A play of Gresset's performed under the name of a comedy in 1745 is perhaps the closest approach to the *drame*. *Sidnei* is a play to be read rather than to be acted : its interest is reflective. The background is England, and the scene a country village, a 'sépulture' according to the valet Dumont, who in this play is the only survival of the old comedy in his impertinence and his devotion to his master. *Sidnei* is a prey to melancholy sentiment.

'Je connais la raison, votre voix me l'apprend ;
Mais que peut-elle enfin contre le sentiment ?'²

he says to his friend Hamilton. He contemplates suicide, as a result of his passion for Rosalie.

'Je suis mal où je suis, et je veux être bien.'

'A la société je ne fais aucun tort,
Tout ira comme avant ma naissance et ma mort,
Peu de gens, selon moi, sont d'assez d'importance
Pour que cet univers remarque leur absence.'³

The discovery of Rosalie near at hand rouses *Sidnei* to love and remorse, but he has taken poison, as he believes, before meeting her. The character of the play is melodramatic, and the entry of the valet, who has suppressed the poison and changed the glass, is not sufficient to give it the appearance of comedy. On two grounds, then, Gresset's *Sidnei*, with its appeal to feeling and reflection and its melodramatic conclusion, suggests the *drame*.

It is, then, in this one *comédie*, in Gresset's tragedy, and in the general tendency of his writings that we find characters tending to those of *drame*; for he desires to paint unspoiled nature and to draw the natural moral from circumstances.⁴

¹ *Edouard III*, Act V. sc. 9.

² Act II. sc. 2.

³ Act II. sc. 6.

⁴ In 1759 Gresset wrote an apology, *Lettre sur la Comédie*, in which he explained that he found the art of the theatre incompatible with revealed religion and with morality. He therefore abandoned the writing of drama. It is clear that he did not adopt the current theory that the drama could be

Voltaire, in *Nanine* (1749) and *L'Enfant Prodigue*, also used the drama of sentiment to affect the sensibility of his hearers. But then Voltaire had no prejudice against a new *genre*. ‘Tous les genres sont bons,’ he said, ‘hors le genre ennuyeux.’ Voltaire leaned to new ways and also had the sense of tradition and he tended to use paradox to cover his conflicting views. So in the letter to the Marquis de Thibouville, 26 Janvier, 1762, he takes Boileau’s view, ‘une comédie, où il n’y a rien de comique, n’est qu’un *sot monstre*.’ On the whole Voltaire’s view of the *drame* was that the appeal to pathos was a proof of want of invention, *stérilité*. This view is expressed under the heading ‘Art Dramatique’ in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*. Fréron, in *L'Année Littéraire*, 1767, viii. 73, says very much the same thing when he asserts that the author can produce tears in the audience without possessing much power of invention or of style.¹

The truth is that the tendency of the age to moralise and sentimentalise the drama is expressed just as much in Voltaire’s tragedies as in *Nanine* or *L'Enfant Prodigue*, which were meant to be *drames*. Only, though Voltaire avoided the satiric drama, he did not intend to dismiss the romantic element or to subordinate it entirely as the writers of pure *drame* consciously did. This was in part due to his classical sympathies and in part to the strong influence upon his mind of Shakespeare’s plays. What contemporary popular tragedy there was in Voltaire’s time was distinctly *larmoyant* in tendency: for example, Lamotte’s *Inès de Castro* (1723), which was throughout an appeal to sensibility. Voltaire’s admiration for Shakespeare, however, impelled him to force on to the French stage violent action and philosophical tirades. His *Brutus* (1730) is introduced by a *Discours* which explains this

a school of morals: he was greatly penetrated with the old French sense of satiric comedy, and with the desire to paint life vividly, and he could not connect this *genre* with the ideals of the writers of *drame*. His attitude to the stage, however, drew down on him the hatred of Voltaire, and this accounts for the ill-deserved abuse heaped on his comedy, *Le Méchant*.

¹ Grimm too, *Corr. Litt.*, vol. iii. p. 229, says of *La Mort de Socrate*: ‘Cette pièce touche et fait pleurer sans qu'on puisse faire cas du talent de l'auteur.’

point of view.¹ *Zaïre* is of course a definite adaptation of *Othello*, but the centre of the action is in Zaïre herself : not in Othello as in the English play : and the titles convey this meaning. The thesis in *Zaïre* is not throughout a moral one : nor is it so in Voltaire's succeeding tragedies. Is the avowed object the duty of toleration, as in *Zaïre* ; is it that of the forgiveness of enemies, as in *Alzire* ? (where Voltaire says he is going to exalt forgiveness 'the most respectable and striking Christian virtue') ; or is it a tirade against fanaticism as in *Mahomet*, or is it the development of maternal love as in *Mérope* ? A second purpose, an emotional one, is visible in all the plays, and there is generally no relief from this. Meantime the moral purpose has become external to the play. In these ways and in others too we can trace the influence of the age. The plays of Voltaire appealed to a less learned and more numerous audience than those of Corneille and Racine had done, and therefore there was a tendency in tragedy, even when classic in form, like Voltaire's, to become garish, emotional, spectacular, or sensational. Voltaire's *Semiramis* marks the beginning of this decline.² During his latter years Voltaire's desires to teach a moral and also be true to historic fact get rather in each other's way, as in *L'Orphelin de la Chine*.³ By 1759 the transformation of the French stage was complete—the spectators were removed from the stage and a dramatic crowd could supply their places.⁴

¹ In *La Mort de César* the crowd appears on the stage, instead of being represented symbolically by messengers or delegates, as was the case in French classical tragedy ; but the form is French and not Shakespearean, the play has three acts and the crisis is at the end.

² See Voltaire's *Correspondance*, 1772 : 'Hélas, j'ai moi-même amené la décadence, en introduisant l'appareil et le spectacle. Les pantomimes l'emportent aujourd'hui sur la raison et la poésie.'

³ See Grimm, *Corr. Litt.*, vol. i. pp. 383-5, in which he criticises the length of *L'Orphelin de la Chine* and the character of Gengis Kan. Of the latter he says : 'Il ne sait ce qu'il veut, il est féroce, il est indécis, il est doux, il est emporté, mais surtout il est raisonnable et politique, qualités insupportables dans un Tartare.'

⁴ In the Elizabethan drama there were instances of stage characters being given the rôle of onlookers at a play, thus enhancing the impression of reality, as e.g. in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. The French spectators, like the English ones, had been accustomed to carry out the precepts of *The Gulf's*

In the last period of Voltaire's life we cannot say what was the predominant characteristic of his drama. Sometimes he says he is giving instruction, sometimes lacerating the feelings of his audience, sometimes presenting them with a spectacle. Voltairean tragedy as such was melting into melodrama, opera, or the *drame bourgeois*.¹ The only exception was when Voltaire was defending a thesis at all points. Thus in *Les Guêtres* (1769) he was defending freedom of conscience.

Of the purely *larmoyant* work of Voltaire's, *Nanine* (1749) is a good example. If Voltaire had been writing a thesis to show the melancholy result of indulgence in sensibility he could not have done better. Author and characters alike seem unable to produce any reasonable or likely chain of events. Nanine only manages to be consecutive when she is alone—in the presence of others she loses what little strength she possesses. The play is said to owe its existence to Richardson's *Pamela*, the ill-success of two plays of the same name having induced Voltaire to change the name of the heroine. The interest aroused in Nanine is largely the pity excited for a helpless woman, who, overwhelmed with emotion, bears a large part of the world's suffering and very little of its responsibilities. The mystification is of the slightest, Nanine's letter to her peasant father being mistaken for one to her lover. The best attempts at characterisation are the jealous Baronne and the loquacious Marquise.

In Voltaire's preface to *Nanine*, he marks out clearly that in his view tragedy should be kept on a high social plane, where too great effects of terror and pity find their place. Comedy should naturally admit the passion of love in its more tender aspect. Certain early tragedies, e.g. Mairet's *Sophonisbe*, had admitted *galanterie*, and Corneille in *Polyeucte*, *La Mort de Pompée*, and *Rodogune*, had allowed verses on love of the familiar and domestic type; in proportion as this happened in tragedy, comedy avoided the subject. Voltaire concludes that comedy must provide

Horn Book, and thus to destroy and ridicule the effect of a tragedy, rather than to translate its feelings to the audience.

¹ Guimond de la Touche developed Voltaire's ideas on the *larmoyant* side.

pleasure, but may also legitimately move the spectator.¹ Hence no doubt his attempt to put life into Richardson's story by characterising in some degree *La Baronne* and *La Marquise* : and by making Blaise the gardener a stupid instrument of intrigue, and by opposing to Nanine's submissive view of the married state the travesty of it which the Count imagines if he is to marry the Baroness :

‘ Hélas ! il a raison,
Il prononçait ma condamnation !
Et moi, du coup qui m'a pénétré l'âme
Je me punis, la baronne est ma femme,
Il le faut bien, le sort en est jeté.
Je souffrirai, je l'ai bien mérité.
Ce mariage est au moins convenable.’²

The work of Nivelle de la Chaussée (1692–1754) concentrated those elements in the drama of the eighteenth century which were of the serious rather than of the amusing or critical type. His drama was perhaps intentionally framed to suit a period when men were taking themselves and their moral function in society with all solemnity, when they were not afraid of being considered ridiculous or pedantic, and were sure that their lives held sufficient interest to make their usual course of action one to be approved of and enjoyed. The fact that Nivelle de la Chaussée was able to put this picture of life on the stage with considerable success is however proof that he himself was able to look upon it as an artist would : and thus he was in reality detached from the *sensibilité* he described. A study of his life confirms this view. He had felt the influence of the English drama, chiefly through the criticisms in the *Spectator* ; he had read his French classics and seen them acted ; he liked a somewhat gross kind of humour, and was accustomed to a theory which was in fact Boileau's, namely, that comedy was meant to amuse, but not to move an audience to tears.

His production of a *comédie larmoyante* was then not due

¹ ‘ La comédie, encore une fois, peut donc se passionner, s'emporter, attendrir, pourvu qu'ensuite elle fasse rire les honnêtes gens. Si elle manquait de comique, si elle n'était que larmoyante, c'est alors qu'elle serait un genre très-vicieux et très désagréable.’—*Préface de Nanine*.

² *Nanine*, Act III. sc. 3.

to any narrow view of the drama. He himself was not dominated by a *sensibilité* that would have this effect. But he could gauge the taste of the day for maxims, for realism, for emotion, and thus he avoided in his plays what was then out of date or out of the picture for the time, that is, ‘une farce surchargée, un badinage abstrait et clair-obscur,’¹ and being in the region of the drama a very Rousseau, he made *sensibilité* the mainspring of every action he described. His notion of comedy, then, was not confined to the classical one : it impinged upon the classical notion of tragedy. The awakening of emotion, rather than of amusement, was to be the object of the dramatist. Pleasure was to be interpreted in its social aspect. It was a theory likely to be accepted at a time when a nation had the making of its history in its own hands. The Prologue to the *Fausse Antipathie* makes it quite evident that Nivelle de la Chaussée considered the drama from many points of view before deciding on the fare he was to put before the public. *Le Bourgeois* advises him to try the ancient comedy which excites to laughter :

‘Or sus, pour commencer, tout d’abord, je conclus
Que la meilleure pièce est où l’on rit le plus !’²

La Critique advises the satiric drama :

‘Quitez tout autre goût, embrassez la Critique,
Armez-vous de ses traits, devenez satirique.’³

La Précieuse wishes philosophy to be popularised in the drama :

‘Ces sujets sont trop bas. Le Public vous en quitte,
Génie ; élevez-vous à des objets plus grands.
Prenez le ton Philosophique,
Ajustez la Métaphysique

A l’usage du sexe et des honnêtes gens.
Pour la mettre à portée, ôtez-lui les échasses.
Mais ne lui donnez pas des allures trop basses,
Ayez le badinage abstrait et clair-obscur,
Toujours enveloppé d’un tendre crépuscule.
Faites vous deviner, vous plairez à coup sûr.’⁴

¹ See the prologue to the *Fausse Antipathie*, 1733.

² Sc. 3.

³ Sc. 4.

⁴ Sc. 5.

L'Admirateur has a very general view :

' Je suis de tous les goûts et de tous les plaisirs.' ¹

Le Petit-Maitre explains how a piece can become popular :

' Les nouveautés sont toujours belles,
 Sans vous embarrasser du choix,
 Ne vous donnez jamais que des Pièces nouvelles ;
 Affichez-les d'abord pour la dernière fois ;
 Prenez double, rendez vos plaisirs impayables,
 Exceptez le Parterre. Il pourrait au surplus
 Vous envoyer à tous les diables.
 C'est, du reste, à quoi je conclus.' ²

Finally *l'Homme Sensé* expresses the sense of the audience in general :

' Je cherche à m'amuser ; encor plus à m'instruire....
 Le vrai, le naturel ont des charmes pour moi.
 Renvoyez aux Forains ces folles rapsodies,
 Que l'on veut bien nommer du nom de comédies,
 Qu'on ne voit qu'une fois, que jamais on ne lit,
 Où l'esprit et le cœur ne font aucun profit.
 Quoi ! nous aurons toujours des farces surchargées ?
 Une intrigue cousue à des scènes brochées ?
 Des suppositions, des caractères faux,
 Absurdes, indécens, chargés outre mesure ;
 Des portraits inventés, dont jamais la nature
 N'a fourni les originaux ?
 Hé quoi ! dans le siècle où nous sommes,
 Quelle nécessité d'imaginer des hommes !
 De pousser leur folie au suprême degré !
 C'est assez des travers que chacun d'eux se donne.
 Peignez-les tels qu'ils sont. Un ridicule outré
 Fait rire, et cependant ne corrige personne.
 Je m'explique peut-être avec témérité.
 Bien d'autres cependant osent penser de même.
 Toutefois je n'en tire aucune autorité.
 A vos décisions, je soumets mon système.' ³

' Les tems sont malheureux ' concludes *Le Génie* when he accepts the work of the new author, Nivelle de la Chaussée.

¹ Sc. 6.

² Sc. 7.

³ Sc. 8.

His first comedy *La Fausse Antipathie* (1733) was really on the same lines as the *Démocrate* of Regnard. Two people who are married quarrel and part, and after many years meet again at the Court of Athens, where each attempts to gain the other's affection ; and then, having discovered their relationship, they begin life again, this time without illusions. In 1735 *Le Préjugé à la mode* was played, as a result of an idea communicated to La Chaussée by Madame Quinault. New names of characters come into this play. Durval is the husband, the wife is Constance (the latter a very favourite name with La Chaussée), and the artificial names derived from Greece and Rome, and made classic by Molière and other dramatists of his time, are now gradually abandoned. The valet-de-chambre is Henri.

In 1737 appeared *L'École des Amis*, where the hero and heroine are Monrose and Hortense, but the friend is still Ariste. *Mélanide* (1741) was a greater play and a greater success ; it is a clear example of the new development of the drama, from which the valet and the soubrette, with any amusement they may have caused, have both disappeared. 1742 saw *Amour pour Amour*, a fanciful play, satiric in design,¹ and in 1743 La Chaussée essayed *Paméla*, but the ill-success of the play was evident the first night. Richardson's heroine was the heroine of this piece. *L'École des Mères* was a great success. The heroine, Marianne, is put into a series of false situations which ensure for her the sympathy of the audience. There are, however, elements of interest in the weak husband and imperious wife, M. et Mme. Argant, and the classic valet comes in again as Lafleur. He appears also in the little play *Le Rival de Lui-Même* (1746) where incidentally he refers to the ‘Opéra forain’ which produces ready-made scenes and characters.² *La Gouvernante* (1747) is however totally *larmoyant* again, though a valet and a soubrette are actually on the stage, the latter under the name of Juliette. Of the remaining plays the most interesting is *L'Homme de Fortune*, but there are others of a more experimental kind, such as *L'amour Castillan*, which help to give an impression of La Chaussée's versatility.

¹ See Nadine's soliloquy, Act I. sc. 4.

² Act I. sc. 2.

If we look at La Chaussée's plots as a whole, we see that he has reproduced from his knowledge of ordinary life a whole series of delicate and difficult situations; and that these very same situations have formed the material for the later nineteenth-century plays of Dumas *filz*, Augier, and especially Sardou. Thus La Chaussée's drama reflected the movement of French life, which was tending to define society in a wider way, and this continuous movement furnished the material for plays a century later. It is perhaps difficult for us to realise that in La Chaussée's time the plots were new,¹ more especially as he embarrassed simple situations with a network of intrigue, and thus he shows us how difficult it was for him to get away from what was then the conventional art and technique of the stage. For example he did not escape from the tyranny of the five-act play, and he fills in the acts with long narratives, which the great classical writers, Corneille, Molière and Racine, had tried to avoid, at any rate until the audience was sufficiently interested in the actors to bear a lengthy recital. But La Chaussée's plan has a peculiarity which served the intrigue. By giving the characters so much to say in explanation of themselves and their past history, the action moves slowly, and the audience is left in doubt for quite a long time about the real subject of the play, since the author's point of view is for the time obscured or concealed. For instance, La Chaussée threw the public off the scent in *Mélanide*, and then returned to the obvious subject suggested by the title. Sometimes La Chaussée leaves the object of the play vague, and then the form tends to be episodic rather than dramatic (as in *La Gouvernante*). Thus a new and undramatic form of play is being prepared, where there is no steady movement towards a solution. This will be the best mould for the problem play of Diderot and later writers. Lanson is of opinion² that this type of play makes the audience share more fully in the suspense

¹ See G. Lanson, *Nivelle de la Chaussée, etc.*, pp. 180, 181, notes.

² *Ibid.* p. 186. 'C'est là un art inférieur, mais ces effets sont très puissants sur le peuple, c'est à dire surtout ce qui n'a pas développé en soi le sens critique ou esthétique; et c'est précisément ce qu'on désigne du nom d'intérêt mélo-dramatique.'

in which the characters find themselves. It is a new art, he says, but of a low type, and is rather melodrama than drama. Thus the crisis in these plays is often not a dramatic crisis which grows out of the action, but it is a part of the original imbroglio which comes to light later and might just as well have come to light earlier. This applies to the discovery of persons in *La Gouvernante* and in *Mélanide*. Circumstances have often to be very violently twisted to put off the declaration, and the *reconnaissance* is then artificially prepared for. In many cases the lengthening out of the dénouement, as in farce, might have its comic side, but in serious drama this process wearis the audience. However, given this considerable and grave defect, there remain counterbalancing qualities in *La Chaussée's drame*. The contrast in *La Gouvernante* between the view of Le Président, as man of the world, and his son Sainville is well marked :

'La raison même a tort, quand elle ne plaît pas,'¹ says Le Président, recalling the efforts of *galanterie*.

Sainville, the representative of the new democratic age, objects to every sign of aristocracy, even of the aristocracy of mind. He dislikes the term 'bonne compagnie' :

'Ce sont les mœurs qui font la bonne compagnie.'²

The President's language is old-fashioned as well as his thoughts. He still uses the climaxes of Corneille :

'Que son abaissement l'élève et m'humilie !'³

Sainville's speech is not ornate and appeals to plain fact, and Angélique asks naively :

'Ne faut-il pas toujours dire la vérité ?'⁴

The transition in society from the old order to the new is here finely and clearly marked. The actual plot of *La Gouvernante* found its way into later literature, and is the precursor of a novel with the same tendency, *East Lynne*,

¹ Act I. sc. 3.

² Act III. sc. 11.

³ Act I. sc. 3.

⁴ Act IV. sc. 4.

which in its turn has been dramatised to appeal to the sensibility of a London and provincial audience of the poorer kind. The farther romance and dramas of sentiment are from lives crushed down by the needs of every day, the more such pictures are appreciated.

In the time of La Chaussée one thing that the public found interesting was the occasional fine action done by some of the characters. But it would be untrue to suppose that these characters were always drawn in such a way as to make the fine action seem natural to them. It was part of the eighteenth-century theory that a commonplace person could be just as great a hero as a gifted man, and thus nothing in La Chaussée's characters seems to contribute to any final great result. The audience were often more ready to accept this illogical position than one would imagine. While they were looking on at a realistic play they still had a romantic expectation about it; they would like to see the ordinary men on the stage doing impossible things in complicated situations. Where the drama was most untrue to life La Chaussée was most sure of the indulgence of his audience. They were not disturbed by any lack of dramatic verisimilitude, unity, or significance in the events.

It seems surprising that the audience should have been affected by the moral taught by these plays, for the moral does not come naturally out of the development of character or action. But here again we have to realise the kind of audience to which the plays appealed. The people were already addicted to a proverbial philosophy and an easy way of disposing of difficult questions. To such listeners the ready maxims of La Chaussée's characters might convey something familiar. They sympathised, too, with the tone of scorn in which he spoke of society. The revolutionary spirit afterwards seen in Rousseau can be traced in La Chaussée, and marks him as the man of his time. Take for example *L'Homme de Fortune*. Here the son of M. Brice reminds one of a hero of Beyle-Stendhal in his sense of unlimited power and capacity, while, as he conceives, he is unjustly oppressed by past and present social forces.

In the first scene where Laurette the *suivante* is talking of Mélanie to whom the younger Brice pays attention, Laurette defines the irascible vanity of the man for us :

' L'abus continual qu'il fait de son mérite ;
 Le faste qu'il affecte, et dont chacun s'irrite ;
 L'air jaloux dont il voit les gens de qualité ;
 Le dépit qu'il en a, sa sensibilité
 D'avoir une naissance ordinaire et commune,
 De n'être que le fils d'un homme de fortune.' ¹

The scene between the elder Brice and his son might indeed have been satirical. The son explains that he has rushed into extravagance in order to obtain any sort of consideration in society :

' Qui vous diroit pourtant que le faste et l'éclat
 Ne sont ni dans mon goût, ni dans mon caractère,
 Que, si j'y suis plongé, rien n'est moins volontaire ;
 Que ce ne fut jamais que par pur désespoir,
 Par la nécessité de me faire valoir ;
 Pour mortifier ceux qui me font trop connoître
 De quel sang fortuné le sort les a fait naître.' ²

Even M. Brice *père* is unable to suggest seriously that *bourgeois* virtues would have stood his son in good stead, though he himself holds firm to his belief in the *bourgeois* class :

' Apprenez qu'un faux noble est bien moins qu'un
 bourgeois.' ³

The son at the end of the scene, by a curious piece of self-analysis, sees the security and happiness of his father's point of view :

' Mon père, avec raison, se refuse à mes vœux :
 Si je pensois ainsi, je serois trop heureux ! ' ⁴

The play, while confessedly *bourgeois*, really turns on the romance of the alliance between the younger Brice and Méranie, daughter of the Vicomte d'Elbon. At the moment

¹ *L'Homme de Fortune*, Act I. sc. 1.

² *Ibid.*, Act I. sc. 3.

³ Act II. sc. 1.

⁴ Act II. sc. 1.

when the Vicomte, mourned as dead, reappears, Brice the elder ceases to control the issues of the plot. As he himself says :

'Conduis le reste, O Ciel, je t'en laisse le soin.'¹

He is only secure in his scrupulous refusal to encourage his son's suit. In these conditions the varied impulses of the other characters have their way, and as La Chaussée imagines these impulses to be good, all works out well. Méranie secures her love, Brice the younger with Méranie a position that his ambition desired. At one point² when events seem to be turning in a different direction the Vicomte cries out :

'Que vois-je ? Ici tout est en larmes.'

But the play ends as all desire and the fantastic and scrupulous obstacles to the happiness of the lovers vanish away.

In the course of the play Méranie has seen clearly the weakness of Brice :

'Vous me livrez sans cesse à la douleur amère
De partager votre âme avec une chimère,'³

she says, realising that ambition on the side of the *bourgeois* son helps to divide them. Le Marquis, who is well born, disputes with Brice the elder, who does not see how it will advance his family if his son becomes ennobled :

'Qu'est-ce qu'un nouveau noble est de plus qu'un bourgeois ?'

says M. Brice, and the Marquis answers :

'Il faut bien commencer. Les noms les plus célèbres Etoient auparavant cachés dans les ténèbres.'⁴

On the whole, while the plot is valueless in *L'Homme de Fortune*, the characterisation is interesting, and the moral is not preached by the characters but comes out through the play. It is not a moral represented by the point of

¹ Act IV. sc. 13.

² Act V. sc. 4.

³ Act II. sc. 2.

⁴ Act IV. sc. 4.

view of any of the characters : but is the contrast expressed between the artificial principles of an elaborate society and the natural principles of kindness which really reign among men, as La Chaussée, following the philosophers, firmly believed to be the case.

It is clear that the love of *sensibilité* which came into fashion at the end of the seventeenth century counted for a good deal in the popularity of La Chaussée. The strict view of love as at its best in sacrifice, which distinguished Corneille, and the almost ascetic philosophy of the seventeenth century in which the power of the will was exalted, yielded to a loose reading of the sensation theory in philosophy (which made much of the senses as the only vehicle of knowledge) and to a sentimental view of the passions, which abandoned the old morality and was satisfied with any act so long as it expressed *sensibilité* and kindness of heart.

The use of abstract terms such as *vertu* encouraged inaccuracy of thinking. All feeling was extolled, and France was close to Diderot's philosophy, with its exaltation of all nature and all natural acts as good. Feeling, it is true, was shown chiefly in the guise of excitability to tears, and the characters in the *drame larmoyant* obviously enjoy the sensation.

In particular the idea that whatever is natural is good has a maleficent effect on morals, because it destroys something at least as natural and more helpful to the progress of society, namely, the desire to be better. La Chaussée's characters express this false view. They think that acquired virtues are a mistake and are hardly to be reckoned with :

‘ Les vertus qu'on acquiert sont si peu naturelles,
Que l'on doit au besoin fort peu compter sur elles.’¹

They are guided by impulse, therefore, and not by reason, and they exercise power over others through their own weakness. On the other hand they have no rational hold on life or health : they faint and even die at the lightest

¹ *L'Ecole de la Jeunesse*, Act IV. sc. 1.

provocation. The obstacles put in their way are of the surprising and romantic order, and misfortune is exaggerated in order to give full play to *sensibilité*. It is obvious that the women in these plays would have to be specially constructed in order to bear all these things : they are, in the first place, astonishingly ignorant of life (*stage ingénues* in fact), and also without balance or judgment. They ask tiresome counter-questions whenever they want to seem moved by reason and are only moved by feeling. They are fractious, not argumentative. Lanson has noticed that they also lose the sense of grammatically constructed sentences, and that there is a want of the simplicity and sincerity that distinguished Racine.¹ While Voltaire and others of his school were still using caustic wit and fine sense, La Chaussée appealed to the large mass of people who were beginning to feel the need for softer, easier, more emotional words. Thus he was preparing the way for Rousseau, who brought *sensibilité* off the stage into ordinary life. And La Chaussée's work would not have been so easily done if he had not with great dramatic skill fitted the subject to the exigencies of the stage. Like all successful French dramatists he knew the technique of the theatre and the true value of a situation.²

The rise of the *drame larmoyant* answered the public expectation at a time when ancient tragedy had ceased to move the audience, and comedy satirised society too painfully. The *drames* described, namely, those of Nivelle de la Chaussée, and the *larmoyant* work of Voltaire and of Gresset, are practically contemporary with one another : thus though Destouches marked the transition between comedy and *drame*, there was otherwise no gradual development in the genre in the eighteenth century. It carried on, it is true, a serious tradition, but it was applied in an exclusively modern way, to fit the taste of the time.

The desire for *larmoyant* drama seems to have been general in Europe, if we are to judge by the translations

¹ G. Lanson, *Nivelle de la Chaussée*, p. 282.

² Take for instance the scene in *Mélanide*, where Darviane forces his father to recognise him in order to avoid a duel on a point of honour.

and adaptations of Nivelle de la Chaussée's works. Many of them were translated into Dutch and Italian, and some freely adapted for the English stage.¹

In many ways the *drame larmoyant* prepared the way for the Romantic drama of the nineteenth century. Except in the case of rare phrases it banished satire from the stage : it exalted feeling above reason and the rights of the individual above the traditions of society. It broke down conventional distinctions between tragedy and comedy, claimed to find romance within the *bourgeois* circle, and aimed at a painting of life full of realistic detail, from which the commonplace and the unpleasing were not excluded. A good deal of Victor Hugo's, de Vigny's and Stendhal's theory in the nineteenth century was thus anticipated. But with the development of the *drame larmoyant* into the *drame bourgeois* comes the theory and practice of Diderot's drama, and we have a critical problem raised which was not acute in Nivelle de la Chaussée : how far does the teaching of morality conflict with the painting of life ? Can the problem be solved in the drama by the admission of irony ? These points are now to be discussed.

The *drame bourgeois* which developed from the *drame larmoyant* is chiefly connected with the name of Diderot. But in the eighteenth century most of the plays of Louis-Sebastien Mercier were considered by himself and his literary friends to be true specimens of *drame*.² It will therefore be convenient to examine both his plays and Diderot's in order to ascertain what were the distinguishing characteristics of this *genre*.

Diderot's *drame* is complicated by his philosophic theory. He had as a basis for his *théâtre* the idea of inspiring a love of virtue, but his philosophic position was in reality non-ethical. It was this :— ‘Nature is good, and all natural acts are good.’ But the imitation of nature does

¹ See St. Genest's *History of the Stage*. *Amour pour amour* was translated into Italian, 1762; *L'École des Mères* in 1796; *La Gouvernante* in the same year. *Mélanide* was translated into Dutch 1759, and Italian, 1762. *Le Préjugé à la Mode* into Italian, 1762, etc., etc.

² Among his forty-two plays, thirty-one of which were printed, some were historical dramas, some imitations of Shakespeare.

not always instruct the spectator in the way of virtue as Diderot thought it should. Diderot, when he considered nature, did not think of it as the ideal or ultimate purpose of life, but rather as the present manifestation of it. Thus any accident or accessory fact would seem to him as 'natural' as a principle of life or law of nature would to us. By an extraordinary twist of thought he imagined that a union of comedy and tragedy would be contrary to this 'nature' in which he believed, and this led him to consider all dramatic possibilities as marked out on a scale. Beyond tragedy lies melodrama, beyond comedy farce; between comedy and tragedy, in undiscovered country, the new genre, *genre sérieux, tragédie domestique ou bourgeoise*: which was not a compromise between comedy and tragedy, but included a study—then completely new—of the conditions of life of the middle classes.¹ Diderot's theory of 'conditions' is that a man may avoid finding his likeness in a stage character, but he will always find a state similar to his own, with which he can sympathise.² (Even the audience, Diderot conceives, go to the play with the social fact in their minds.) Thus situation should, he thinks, control character in the drama. Contrast is however produced between character, dramatic situation, and social conditions. Problems here arise too complicated for a simple solution on the stage; and this is one reason why Diderot's drama is said to foreshadow the modern problem play. Another reason is that, as we have shown, there is an underlying ethical problem in Diderot's own mind with which he never really grappled, and he was never sure

¹ 'Le genre sérieux, où il n'y a pas le mot pour rire, n'a rien à voir avec la comédie, et n'inspirant pas la terreur, il n'est pas non plus la tragédie. C'est un genre à part, qui a sa raison d'être particulière. Il n'a pas pour but de présenter à la scène les ridicules, les vices, ou les grandes passions, mais, ce qui est un fonds non moins riche, les devoirs des hommes, les actions ou affaires sérieuses, qui, étant les plus communs, augmenteront tout ensemble et l'étendue et l'utilité du genre. Or les devoirs des hommes, c'est-à-dire d'hommes bourgeois, sont à la fois sociaux et domestiques. Il faut donc présenter sur la scène les "conditions" des hommes et leurs "relations de famille."'
3e Entretien.

² 'Pour peu que le caractère fût chargé, un spectateur pouvait se dire à lui-même : ce n'est pas moi. Mais il ne peut se cacher que l'état qu'on joue devant lui ne soit le sien ; il ne peut méconnaître ses devoirs.'

whether a play should be didactic or realistic. The difference between Diderot's drama and a modern play is chiefly that in a modern problem play the actual force of the problem is expressed in the dramatic crisis, which is always at the end, and that the play rarely extends over more than three acts. In Diderot the sense of the problem and the dramatic sense do not so clearly co-operate. The modern play combines the form of the classical drama with the aim of Diderot's *théâtre*.¹

Of Diderot's plays, some—e.g. *Le Fils Naturel*—are only interesting from the point of view of the *comédie bourgeoise*, and as a study of *sensibilité*; others—e.g. *Est-il bon, est-il méchant?*—are instances of the problem play in its earliest form, developed later by Ibsen, and invading the drama of all European nations in the nineteenth century. The evolution from one style to another is, as we have seen, partly connected with the form. A loose episodic play, not really dramatic, is the soil on which the problem thrives, especially the problem which is never intended to have any solution; while if the author's mind is preoccupied by problems, as Diderot's undoubtedly was, he will be unable to express his thought in any concise form. In contrast with *La Chaussée*, Diderot avoids romantic incident and imbroglio. The events that happen to his characters are as dull as the characters themselves. But he develops quite remarkably the social side of experience in the drama. The interest of the events is that they happened to someone in a particular social relation, either domestic (e.g. to father and son) or civil (to magistrate, merchant, soldier, lawyer). The problem is not that of the individual life, but that of the individual in a particular and defined relation to society. For his successors in the drama Diderot had to wait till the romantic revival was over, but in the eighteenth century his dramatic experiment had a flavour that was all its own.²

¹ Cf. *Hindle Wakes*, *Rutherford and Son*, *Typhoon*, and certain of Galsworthy's plays.

² Grimm (*Corr. Litt.*, vol. ii. p. 104–7) notices the ‘Morale élevée et pathétique’ of *Le Fils Naturel* and also says: ‘... il ne tient qu'à M. Diderot de faire une révolution salutaire dans les mœurs, en ramenant les conditions sur la scène, et son *Père de famille* accomplira cette prédiction.’

The most interesting play to examine is *Est-il bon, est-il méchant?*—in which the chief character, Hardouin, has a strong resemblance to Diderot himself. The title marks out the problem. When at the end of the play it is put again by Madame de Chépy in the form of a question the answer is: ‘*L'un après l'autre*’; while another character finishes the phrase:

‘Comme vous, comme moi, comme tout le monde.’

The dialogue is a contrast to the somewhat artificial tone of *La Chaussée*'s. It is modern, full of *verve* and *esprit*, and the movement is rapid. Hardouin has ‘des mouvements de cœur’ which always come at the wrong time. He yields too soon, or too late, holds out when it is not necessary, gives in uselessly. His *sensibilité* is nothing but a snare in the practical life. His imagination too combines events in such a grotesque way that the judgment which issues from them is always false. But perhaps Diderot had a double end in view in writing this play. His description of *l'homme sensible* may be not merely a subject for drama, but also a subject for satire. Possibly he meant to satirise contemporary life, and the *drame* which reflected it. Take for example Hardouin's soliloquy on play-writing (Act II. sc. 1), and the description of M. de Crancey as he followed (or rather preceded in the guise of a postillion) Madame de Vertillac and her daughter. Even the *entrées* of the characters (*à propos* of the difficulties in which Hardouin is soon to be enmeshed) resemble ironically the unexpected entrances in a romantic play, though Diderot always manages to produce some sufficient and commonplace reason for them when all is examined. Then the character of Hardouin himself falls into the picture. He has *l'dme sensible*. He is touched to tears by distress, and this impels him to take the most *gauche* methods of succouring the afflicted. The working out of this thesis is ingenious, and the whole play witty. The same cannot be said of Diderot's other plays, which move slowly, are not always illuminated by humour, and translate life as Diderot

sees it with less satire and also less grace than *Est-il bon, est-il méchant?* The universal philanthropist is generally treated by him with the solemnity befitting the occasion.¹

The fact that Diderot himself hesitated between didactic and realistic drama gave his productions uncertainty of aim and inequality in construction. This latter point can be illustrated by comparing his treatment of the subject of *Le Père de Famille* with Sedaine's treatment of the same theme in *Le Philosophe sans le savoir*. Sedaine deliberately recast the play and improved its form. Sedaine's play simplified the action, and removed the moral outbursts that were characteristic of the *genre bourgeois*. He was accustomed to write opera, in which every word has to have its immediate appeal on simple lines. His delicate delineation of character in the play makes it still interesting; and this domestic drama has gaiety as well as sentiment.²

The uncertainty of aim in Diderot's plays goes so far that it is a question whether even in *Le Fils Naturel* or *Le Père de Famille* he really threw himself into a *drame bourgeois*, or whether we must consider these plays as serious experiments, and *Est-il bon, est-il méchant?* as a flippant one. The difficulty induced Diderot to work out a new theory of the drama, which was certainly not that of the *drame* as then understood, but which opened new opportunities for the stage. He had recommended a certain procedure to the actor in the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*.³ In this pamphlet Diderot shows us that he considers all the world a stage, where the fools are the actors, the wise men sit in the *parterre*, criticise and make copy out of the follies they see. Thus the dramatist in an eighteenth-century world must

¹ Two earlier sketches, *Plan d'un divertissement domestique* and *La Pièce et le Prologue*, worked up in *Est-il bon, est-il méchant?* both satirise the drama.

² See e.g. M. Desparville's soliloquy, Act I. sc. 3: ‘Il faut que cet homme marie justement sa fille aujourd’hui, le jour, le même jour que j’ai à lui parler, c'est fait exprès. Oui, c'est fait exprès pour moi. Ces choses-là n'arrivent qu'à moi.’

³ The *Observations sur Garrick* written in 1770 contained exactly the same ideas that were afterwards worked up in the *Paradoxe*.

afford to do without *sensibilité*, and the actor, who is the dramatist's collaborator, had better do without it too.¹

Everything is imitation, 'singerie sublime,' for art is only the imitation of nature. 'C'est la manque de sensibilité qui fait les acteurs sublimes.'²

Diderot's desire that the actor should be conscious, and not moved by pure *sensibilité* only, seems to be connected with an argument in defence of beauty of attitude and action on the stage. Thus he insists that a death on the stage should be calculated to produce the right and noble effect : a woman must fall modestly and with a movement natural in appearance and yet artistic in its result. Pure nature, says Diderot, certainly has her sublime moments, but it takes an artist to seize them and reproduce them. As we should say now, he must intuitively seize them, but consciously express them.³ Here Diderot's real position is opposed to the didactic theory of the century and also to pure realism in the drama. His ideal drama is personal, depending on the conscious artistic choice of the author. But Diderot is with his century when he thinks of the actor, not as a brilliant star, but as a member of a society all of whom are taking part in the same artistic effort. It is perhaps for the reason given by Diderot that French acting is so superior as an art. The French actor measures his rôle, compares it with that of others, and instead of shining individually he plays his part for the good of the com-

¹ 'Dans la grande comédie, la comédie à laquelle je reviens toujours, celle du monde, toutes les âmes chaudes occupent le théâtre, tous les hommes de génie sont au parterre. Les premiers s'appellent des fous ; les seconds, qui s'amusent à copier leurs folies, s'appellent des sages ; c'est l'œil fixe du sage qui saisit le ridicule de tant de personnages divers, qui le peut, et qui nous fait rire ensuite du tableau de ces fâcheux originaux dont vous avez été quelquefois la victime ... C'est qu'il (l'acteur) s'écoute encore au moment où il vous trouble, et que tout son talent consiste non pas à se laisser aller à sa sensibilité comme vous le supposez, mais à imiter si parfaitement tous les signes extérieurs du sentiment que vous vous y trompiez.' P. 119.

² 'Qu'est-ce donc, que le vrai ? C'est la conformité des signes extérieurs, de la voix, de la figure, du mouvement, de l'action, du discours, en un mot de toutes les parties de jeu, avec un modèle idéal ou donné par le poète ou imaginé de tête par l'acteur. Voilà le merveilleux.' P. 121.

³ See Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic*.

pany.¹ Cool reflection and judgment, Diderot urges, are necessary for this.²

The collaboration between actor and dramatic author was well understood by Diderot. He quotes Voltaire's remark on seeing Clairon in one of his pieces. ‘Est-ce bien moi qui ai fait cela ?’ Then, in the *Paradoxe* (p. 186), he points out that the actor has to lose himself in the poet's conception. ‘Il faut quelquefois que l'acteur se sacrifie au poète.’

Diderot comes to a point at which he asks himself if there is not such a thing as a *sensibilité artificielle*. By this he probably means imaginative sensibility as opposed to instinctive sensibility. The second interlocutor in the *Paradoxe* has just been quoting Locke: ‘... or, il n'y a rien dans l'entendement qui n'ait été dans la sensation,’³ when Diderot begins to analyse sensibility. The analysis of sensibility leads Diderot further, and he analyses realism in order to find out what is truth in art. He defines it as proportion, as conformity with an ideal imagined by the writer.⁴

Diderot in his *Paradoxe* thus really opened the way to a wider criticism of art. He himself gave a more elevated meaning to the term sensibility than was usual in his century. He admits the part of imagination in the reflection of life on the stage, and he admits, too, a poetic and imaginative rendering of a part by an actor who thus collaborates with the author.

Diderot's plays, written during the progress of his critical ideas, are thus experimental and reflect different

¹ ‘C'est comme dans une société bien ordonnée, où chacun sacrifice de ses droits primitifs pour le bien de l'ensemble du tout. Or qui est-ce qui connaîtra le plus parfaitement la mesure de ce sacrifice ? L'homme juste dans la société, l'homme à la tête froide au théâtre.’

² See also in the *Paradoxe*: ‘Et savez-vous l'objet de ces répétitions si multipliées ? C'est d'établir une balance entre les talents divers des acteurs, de manière qu'il en résulte une action générale qui soit une ; et lorsque l'orgueil de l'un d'entre eux se refuse à cette balance, c'est toujours aux dépens de la perfection du tout, au détriment de votre plaisir ...’, p. 145.

³ P. 158.

⁴ ‘Le poète sur la scène peut être plus habile que le comédien dans le monde, mais croit-on que sur la scène l'acteur soit plus profond, soit plus habile à feindre la joie, la tristesse, la sensibilité, l'admiration, la haine, la tendresse, qu'un vieux courtisan ?’ p. 189.

phases of his theory. They are hardly clear examples of the *drame bourgeois*. They hesitate, as we have seen, between expressing a didactic purpose or a realistic picture of life. They reflect the changing mood of the author as *sensible* or reflective, as tending to romance or to satire. It is the insoluble or at any rate the unsolved problem which Diderot can then most easily throw into the artistic form which was a necessity to him as a playwright. His drama had no succession at the time, but takes its place in the history of eighteenth-century experiments. After romance in the nineteenth century had had its great blossoming, the subtle questionings of the plays of Diderot were repeated in modern shape by a more critical age.¹

The plays of Mercier are more rigidly limited to the notion of *drame* as it was then understood than were Diderot's. While he was opposed to the idea of a strong contrast between comedy and tragedy, and considered the word *drame* as the general and collective name, embracing all genres,² he was clear that each play should have its unity of conception, and should be a picture of life seen with the eye of an artist. In this way Mercier, like La Chaussée, simplified his subject by exercising artistic choice. His adaptation of English plays gives a very good idea of his method of work. For instance, his first play, *Jenneval*, was taken from Lillo's *London Merchant*, but the incoherence of the play struck Mercier with force, especially when he contrasted it with the other English play³ which had suggested Regnard's *Le Joueur*, and Saurin's *Beverley*; and he reduced the scenes in Lillo's play to order, and recast the whole in *Jenneval*, where, whatever are the other merits or the demerits of the play,⁴ there is a unity given by the visualising of one aspect of life.⁵ When we consider that

¹ See especially the drama of Ibsen and of his followers in England.

² *Du Théâtre*, p. 95. 'Drame, qui est le mot collectif, le mot original, le mot propre.'

³ Moore's *The Gamester* (1753), also translated by Diderot in 1760.

⁴ Mercier changes the ending, and makes Jenneval (Barnwell) repent.

⁵ See *Du Théâtre*, p. 147, where Mercier dwells on the fact that the unity of interest in a play must be kept. He sees that the Tragi-comedy of the sixteenth century in France failed from this lack of unity. *Ibid.* p. 96.

Mercier could read and enjoy Shakespeare and Lope de Vega, we see that his understanding of dramatic unity was not narrow: he could feel, for example, the unity of interest in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, and could contrast it favourably with the English drama of the Restoration which kept the loose and episodic form of the Shakespearean drama but was without its strong unity of appeal. He felt, too, that a play must be intelligible to the public.¹ and that plays ought only to be judged as acting plays, and not as literature intended for private reading.² On many grounds, chiefly on that of enabling the author to produce a truer picture of life, he preferred that plays should be written in prose.³

Mercier's plays are usually dismissed in histories of literature in one brief and chilling sentence. It is true that very few of them have survived, none have been lately reprinted or put upon the stage. But when they are read without prejudice they do not seem to have deserved their complete oblivion in contrast with the plays of other writers contemporary with Mercier, and in his lifetime they had a considerable measure of success. It seems necessary to seek for further reasons to account for the disparaging view usually taken of this writer's work. One reason appears on the surface. Mercier was not only a dramatist and a dramatic critic, but he was a political enthusiast and a critic of society. His publication, *L'an 2440*, was put on the Index by Rome, and also drew down on Mercier the dislike of the many classes of men who were satirised in this *Rêve*. His *Songes Philosophiques*, his two pamphlets, *De la Littérature* and *Du Théâtre*, his *Tableau de Paris*, all contained a criticism of French administration and social life. This was partly a result of Mercier's travels and wide reading; his experience of England, for example, urged him to a greater sense of proportion in the comparison of Paris and London than was usual among his contemporaries.

¹ *Du Théâtre*, p. 195.

² *Ibid.* p. 293. ‘Mais il faut avouer (quoi qu'on exige aujourd'hui) que le Drame est fait pour la représentation et non pour la lecture.’

³ *Ibid.* p. 295.

Mercier's opinion then divided sharply from the common opinion of his day. His views on political corruption, on town sanitation, on the place of a national theatre in public life, were too advanced to gain for their author a hearty reception. In some plays, e.g. in *L'Indigent*, he makes a definite attack not only on the corruption of manners of the time but also on the selfishness of the class of landlords, thus anticipating more than one play of this century in both France and England.

Again, Mercier's quarrel with the Comédie Française was fatal to his reputation as a dramatist. Only one of his plays, *La Maison de Molière*, ever got into their repertory. A recent play on the same subject with the same title, produced in Paris, does not owe much in treatment to Mercier's example, but the two objects of the modern play, the celebration of Molière as the national dramatist, and the opening of the difficult question of his domestic life as a subject for drama, both reproduce the aims of Mercier's play, which was acted in Molière's own theatre in 1787 and before the King and Queen at Versailles.¹

But Mercier, if working against difficulties in France, was not without his recognition elsewhere. His plays, like those of La Chaussée and Diderot,² were translated and reproduced in other countries. They were nearly all printed in England or Holland and sold at Paris. *Jenneval* (1771) was translated into German and Italian, *Le Déserteur* into Italian and German, *La Brouette du Vinaigrer* (1771) into Tcheck, Dutch and German, *L'Indigent* (1772) into English as *The Distressed Family*, while it was also curiously combined with the plot of Destouches' *Le Dissipateur* by Mrs. Inchbald.³ *Le faux ami* (1772) was translated into Italian and Dutch, *Le Juge* (1774) into Dutch, *Jean Hen-*

¹ On November 14. The play was adapted by Mercier from Goldoni's *Il Moliere*.

² *Dorval* was translated into English 1767, Dutch 1775, Italian 1796. *Le Père de Famille* into English 1781, Italian 1762, and republished in Italy 1796.

³ Under the title of *Next-door Neighbours*. All Diderot's plays were translated into German, and many into English, Dutch, and Italian, and La Chaussée's plays into Dutch, Italian and English.

nuyer (1775) into English and Dutch, *Natalie* (1775) into Dutch, German and Italian, *L'Habitant de la Guadaloupe* (1778) into English, Dutch and Italian, *Les Tombeaux de Véronne* (1796) into Italian and Spanish,¹ and this list is not exhaustive. History and foreign plots (in *Timon d'Athènes*, *La Maison de Molière*, *Les Tombeaux de Véronne*) have been laid largely under contribution by Mercier himself.

When we come to examine Mercier's drama in detail it is evident that the value of his plays varies according to Mercier's bent at the time of writing. Is he intending to give a true picture of life? He gives us striking scenes like those which occur at the beginning of *Jean Hennuyer* and *L'Indigent*. But is he wishing to teach a moral in direct words? Then he either makes the characters utter long-winded speeches about right and duty, as in the latter half of *Jean Hennuyer*, or he is obliged to turn aside from realism and produce a plot which will illustrate his thesis. This occurs in the rather romantic conclusion of *L'Indigent*, in the melodramatic end of *Le Déserteur*, in the setting and conclusion of *La Brouette du Vinaigrer*. For the moralist in the drama must be something else than the recorder of photographic detail. Nature is not necessarily moral, and the observance of natural facts does not always tend to individual or social morality. Thus the dramatic moralist is obliged either to construct an ideal or to describe the real satirically. Mercier is on the whole more often a moralist than a realist, but he has the artistic instinct of getting his work within compass and on one plane. If it is not like life it is harmonious. If it is not useful or moral it is harmonious. And all the plays are conspicuous by possessing unity, though they are equally conspicuous in avoiding the notion of conflict which is the note of tragedy. Mercier was too strong an optimist to admit the overpowering sense of evil that is characteristic of great tragedy. At the same time his optimism is strong and not weak. He cares intensely that the right should prevail, and this warmth is so infectious that the audience finds itself sympathising with the characters in his plays,

¹ This is a curious case of returning a play to its birthplace.

even though there is no doubt that all will be well with them in the best of all possible stage worlds. He observes, he faces evil, and desires to reform the world, but his own conflict was over before he could express it in literature. What he carried into the artistic field was the zeal of the social reformer. Therefore some of his plays are not more interesting than the projects of a town councillor for municipal reform would be if dramatised. They represent a series of hoped-for and expected events—and if the facts surrounding his heroes are likely, but do not make a play, Mercier has no hesitation in introducing unlikely facts and so drawing his plays to a conclusion.

His first play, *Jenneval ou le Barnaveld français*, was a clever adaptation : Mercier himself appears more truly in *Le Déserteur* of the same year. Here we see his cosmopolitan interest, for the scene is laid in Alsace, and the characters are a German mother and daughter, Madame Luzère and Clary, a French lodger, Durimel (the *Déserteur*), in love with Clary ; the French officers, St. Franc and Valcourt, billeted on the household, and the disappointed lover, who as an inhabitant of the town has the opportunity of bringing about a tragedy, in which he nearly succeeds, and of betraying Durimel. In the final act (the play is thoroughly well constructed and there are not too many words, nor even too many phrases) the character of Madame Luzère comes out well. She is firm, self-reliant, alert, not despising danger, but facing it with excellent judgment. Living on the borderland between two nations, she knows both France and Germany, and estimates the national as well as the individual qualities of the other characters. Clary has the restrained self-respect of her mother, with an effective mixture of obedient confidence and *abandon*. Of her two lovers she prefers Durimel, even when her frank preference seems to expose him to danger, and she keeps at bay Valcourt the fiery subaltern who looks upon her as fair game. The transition in Valcourt, in whom all feelings are centralised in women and his pleasure in them, to a chivalry derived from the same source and purified by a sense of honour, is excellently done. St. Franc's test of Durimel and satisfaction that

the latter, who turns out to be his own son, can face death, raises the play above the merely sentimental plane; as originally conceived there was a tragic ending with a moral satisfaction in it, but Mercier bent to the desire of the public for a happy ending. In its final form Valcourt's intervention saves Durimel, and turns the play into melodrama:

‘Je ne suis qu'un homme sensible,’ says Valcourt, ‘mais voici deux Héros !’ pointing to the father and the son.¹ ‘J'ai sauvé deux Héros, j'ai rendu la vie à une famille respectable, et j'ai reconcilié mon Père et mon ami.’

In fact he has done all that was necessary for melodrama, *drame* and comedy. But a truer note is struck in the last words of the play:

‘Quand un Français entreprend une bonne action, le bonheur de réussir est sa plus glorieuse récompense.’

The play abounds in shrewd remarks, generally of a moral character. ‘L'extrême malheur enfante l'extrême courage,’ says St. Franc.² Durimel in the same scene says ‘Le trépas ne sera pour moi qu'un instant. C'est vous qui souffrirez, et longtems.’

Another successful play of Mercier's, freely translated into many languages, was *La Brouette du Vinaigrier*. This is a purely sentimental drama without the lively action that helped *Le Déserteur* or *L'Indigent*. The scene is laid in commercial circles. Delomer is the successful tradesman, keeping up a kindly interest in Dominique *père*, who possesses the *brouette*, and in Dominique *fils*, who knows modern languages and acts as his secretary, and who falls in love with Mademoiselle Delomer. Dominique *file* retires from the unequal combat, as Delomer wishes to marry his daughter well: but the inevitable loss of fortune occurs at the right moment, and Mademoiselle Delomer is faced with the convent, for her admirer, having only wished to marry a rich wife, leaves her in the lurch. Dominique *fils* is then subjected to a test by his old father who insists on calling on the Delomers while pushing his *brouette*. Of this

¹ Act V. sc. 6.

² Act V. sc. 3.

the son is somewhat ashamed—and the *brouette* is put in the corner of the *porte-cochère*. Dominique *père*, having thus exposed the latent snobbishness of his son, opens the barrel, and takes out bags and bags of gold, the 'fruit of honest labour,' restores the Delomer family and makes the lovers happy. In this *drame*, then, Mercier allows himself an impossible romantic situation, and a little fun at the foibles of class which occur in every condition of society. In his preface he had said that any part of life could be material for drama, but also that it could be material for amusement as well as for a moral lesson. His play, so far as it goes, seems to justify the theory,¹ if we give up the idea that the plot need be a likely one.

The characters in this play, as in others of Mercier's, utter many things that are pointed and full of good sense. So Mademoiselle Delomer, accusing Dominique *filz* of bitterness, says 'Vous êtes ironique'—and his prompt answer is 'Je ne suis que malheureux.'² Dominique also says, in discussing poverty, 'On est toujours riche, quand on a tout payé,' while another remark is 'Sans un peu d'abondance l'amour lui-même se détruit et fait place à la discorde.'³

In *L'Indigent* (1772) we get a more interesting background in the contrast between rich and poor. Joseph and Charlotte, supposed to be brother and sister, live together in the deepest poverty. Joseph weaves and Charlotte sews. Their affection for each other is the only light in their lives. With a scrupulous care for the setting of the stage, worthy of Ibsen, Bernard Shaw, or Galsworthy, Mercier describes the miserable room in which Joseph and Charlotte live. A dressing-room opens out of the main room, through which the north wind blows, and in the dressing-room Charlotte is asleep. The end of her bed, containing her feet, projects on to the stage. M. de Lys, a rich young man, has seen Charlotte, and wishes to possess

¹ Préface de *La Brouette*. 'Tout le détail de la vie humaine est également son objet ... Que lui importe un diadème ? Sous cette étoffe grossière il a touché une âme sensible ... Il devient fécond, animé, riant, et moral.'

² Act II. sc. 2.

³ Act III. sc. 4.

her. He sends a messenger to see the condition in which she lives, and gives the brother money. Charlotte is thus enticed to the house, but having been brought up to read the literature of the day, she knows her *Pamela*¹ and suspects De Lys. Finding herself locked in with De Lys, she seizes his gun and batters the door with the butt-end. In the action she discharges one barrel. No one is hurt, but the valet opens the door and Charlotte escapes.² Meanwhile De Lys is searching for a sister who was put out to nurse, and whom he only desires to find in order to destroy, since his father's will commanded him to divide possessions with her. In an extremely amusing scene between De Lys and the honest notary, each wishes to tell the other of the near discovery of the sister, and neither will listen to what the other has to say.³ Finally Joseph and Charlotte find Charlotte's foster-father, who is arranging at the honest notary's for a marriage between the two young people when De Lys comes in. Hurried into an adjoining room, Joseph, Charlotte and her foster-father hear the secret of Charlotte's birth. De Lys when he realises the facts and is confronted with the indigent family becomes generous and brotherly and his former conduct is forgiven. Mercier makes dramatic use of the words of De Lys and of Charlotte, when the latter is first introduced into De Lys' presence expecting to find her brother there. De Lys assures her that her brother is there, *has been* there, which in the light of the *dénouement* turns out to have been an unconsciously true remark, though he intended at the time to deceive her.⁴ And again the good birth of Charlotte and likeness to De Lys has been noticed by his servant. But no ingenuity can disguise the fact that the last events are stage events.

Le Juge (1774) turns upon a conscientious judgment made by a judge ‘représentant sur un petit théâtre obscur comme s'il était devant l'Assemblée de la Nation.’ Before

¹ ‘Elle parle comme Paméla,’ says De Lys, and extracts the confession that Charlotte has read the book. Act II. sc. 5.

² In an English version in *Next-door Neighbours*, Eleanor seizes the pistol but does not discharge it.

³ Act II. sc. 6.

⁴ Act I. sc. 5.

we pass on to that part of Mercier's work which is outside the *drame* proper, it will be convenient to notice two characteristics of the *drame* which he shares with Diderot.

First, there is Mercier's desire to put upon the stage what he calls 'un beau moment de la vie humaine'¹; the crisis is always one of feeling, of generosity, of noble action, prepared for by a chain of events that in Mercier has the character of the old-fashioned intrigue, only in Mercier the elements deftly woven together are not simply disentangled, they are torn apart in some violent crisis of emotion. He thinks the effect of the drama should be to produce a picture that is at the same time interesting, moral, critical, amusing and realistic.² We have already seen that these ideas are not all compatible with one another. Into this picture of life he wishes to admit people of mixed characters, of variable development, of obscure origin, of the provinces, not only of Paris, while other nations should be alluded to with understanding and respect instead of with scorn and insolence. Among the characters he suggests for dramatic treatment are the spendthrift, the intriguer, the honest peasant, the atheist, the envious man, and the Stoic (in opposition to Rousseau, for Mercier thought self-control a quality to be portrayed in art, while Rousseau only contemplated uncontrolled emotion and simple impulses), the business man, the doctor. If a really imaginary character is to be admitted, a combination never actually seen is that of the philosopher-king.³ We have here something very like Diderot's theory of the interest which can be excited by describing virtue and vice in different professions and grades of society.

Then again, Mercier's theory of dialogue is very like

¹ *Du Théâtre*, p. 106.

² 'Le drame peut donc être tout à la fois un tableau intéressant, parce que toutes les conditions humaines viendront y figurer; un tableau moral, parce que la probité morale peut et doit y dicter les loix; un tableau de ridicule et d'autant plus avantageusement peint, que le vice seul en portera les traits; un tableau riant, lorsque la vertu, après quelques traverses, jouira d'un triomphe complet; enfin, un tableau du siècle, parce que les caractères, les vertus, les vices seront essentiellement ceux du jour et du pays.' *Du Théâtre*, p. 105.

³ *Du Théâtre*, p. 157 note.

the psychological theory of Diderot. If, says Mercier, man really knows himself, he becomes aware of a perpetual struggle between two parts of his own being. Let him study this conflict—and express it in monologue. This is the best training for stage dialogue. Here Mercier seems to have realised the special function of the monologue, used by Shakespeare and by Racine, as detailing the inner struggle ; and also to have seen that the conflict is between the conscious and subconscious elements in man. Where one takes the form of goodness and the other of evil we have the germ of plays such as *Britannicus*, where Néron has a good genius and evil genius on each side who together express his own personal struggle between good and evil.¹ ‘L’homme, quand il le veut,’ concludes Mercier, ‘est un animal qui se connoit bien.’

In a skit dated ‘2440,’ called *Les Comédiens ou le Foyer*, Mercier brings in the shade of Molière to protest in the name of common sense against theatrical mannerisms, and the stage language that in *La Maison de Molière* Mercier happily called *un jargon brillanté*.² The same admiration of Molière and inclination to admit comedy into the *drame* is shared by an obscure writer Patrat, who in a *divertissement* called *Le Conciliateur à la Mode* brings in Thalie to explain that the public want something more than sentiment in the theatre. The authors chosen for commendation are Marivaux, Favard (in vaudeville), Grétry (in opera), and Mercier (in *drame*). *Le Drame* comes in as a character, mainly uttering these lines :

‘Dieux !—Juste ciel ! Hélas !
Amour ! Honneur ! Devoir ! Nature !
Je pleure.’

¹ ‘L’art du dialogue, si peu perfectionné dans nos meilleurs poètes, consiste, si je ne me trompe, à se bien connaître, à sentir ces deux êtres qui résident au dedans de nous, ce *double moi* de Pascal, l’un, qui est l’instinct de la nature, et qui nous domine, l’autre, l’instinct de la volonté, qui s’efforce à maîtriser son adversaire : tour à tour vainqueurs, tour à tour vaincus, ils sont toujours dans une lutte éternelle. Quand le poète aura suivi l’art du soliloque, qu’il se sera vu sans détour, qu’il aura sondé son âme, l’art du dialogue, si rare aujourd’hui, lui deviendra familier.’ *Du Théâtre*, p. 182 (note).

² *Préface de La Maison de Molière*, p. ix.

while Thalie puts her view into a stanza :

'Je respecte beaucoup tout ce qui pent vous plaire,
Racine, Crébillon, Voltaire,
Corneille, dont partout on respecte le nom ;
Mais vous auriez grand tort, vous qui faites la fière,
De mépriser dans votre humeur altière,
Destouches, Regnard et Piron,
Et de ne pas idolâtrer Molière.'

It transpires from an examination of the plays of Diderot and Mercier that a problem play, even if in a conventional or harmonious setting, nearly always forces the note : that the realistic play has no inevitable moral : while the moral force of a play, so greatly desired by both authors, is seen to depend largely on the power of a dramatist to present it with the help of romance or satire. While the *drame* tended in the case of Diderot to be tinctured with satire, and in the case of Mercier to be influenced by romance, *drame* itself, which had affected comedy at the end of the century, will be seen to have influenced tragedy too at the same period.

CHAPTER IV

TRAGEDY

Decadence of tragedy. Longepierre—La Fosse—Duché—L'Abbé Genest—La Noue—Declamation on the stage—Exaggerated intrigue : Campistron, Lagrange-Chancel—Saurin—De Belloi—Crébillon—The tragedies of Voltaire—Influence of tragédie-opéra : *Semiramide*, *Tancrède*—La Harpe—The beginnings of a new era : Versions of Shakespeare—Ducis—Legouvé—Marie-Joseph Chénier—Lemerrier.

FRENCH tragedy after Corneille and Racine follows a downward course in the eighteenth century. The change comes very gradually, because Racine's immediate successors, though they often avoid the classical manner for tragedy, and use for their setting the circumstances of a later time, still exhibit a psychology of feeling that is very reminiscent of their master. Thus Longepierre's *Médée*, represented in 1694, illustrates the conflict between a strong emotion and the sense of duty of the individual to society. In this play the traditional confidants act as the other selves of Jason and Médée : thus recalling Racine's method in *Britannicus*. Iphite begs Jason to consult his reason :

'Si vous daigniez encor consulter la raison.'¹

But Jason is in the power of a strong emotion :

'Mais, transporté d'amour en voyant ce que j'aime,
J'oublie et mon devoir, et Médée, et moi-même.
Je m'enivre à longs traits d'un aimable poison :
L'amour devient alors ma suprême raison.
Et d'un feu violent l'impérieuse flamme
Etouffe tout le reste, et triomphe dans mon âme.'²

¹ Act I. sc. 1.

² Act I. sc. 1.

In contrast to Jason's struggle between his love for Créuse and his gratitude to Médée, we have Médée's fierce jealousy and blame of Jason for deserting her. By an effect of passion which is very telling in Longepierre's play the strength of Médée's magic powers seems to be connected with the violence of her love and hatred. The powers are psychic, as well as magic ; she only cares to exercise them when impelled by her hatred or her overpowering desire. However, this side of Médée's character only gradually dawns on the reader. At first she is a mere woman imagining that she is reasoning out her revenge and deciding that it shall fall on Créon, though it is clear that her love for Jason and her jealousy of interference, rather than her reason, have dictated her action. Her soliloquy, full of questions and exclamations, like the soliloquies in Racine's plays, bears out this reading of her character :

‘ La haine avec l'amour, le courroux, la douleur,
M'embrasent à présent, d'une juste fureur :
Que n'enfantera point cette fureur barbare ?
Le crime nous unit, il faut qu'il nous sépare.’¹

Then again, though in the interview with Créon Médée can be ironical :

‘ Qu'à ces rares bontés j'ai de grâces à rendre !
Vous m'ôtez mon époux, vous le prenez pour gendre :
Vous me chassez enfin. Dites-moi seulement
Quel attentat m'attire un si doux traitement ? ’²

when alone with Rhodope she appeals to love :

‘ O toi qui vois mon trouble et cause ma douleur
Amour, daigne amollir l'ingrat en ma faveur !
Remets-le dans mes fers, efface son injure :
Rends-moi, dieu tout-puissant, le cœur de ce parjure :
Tout mon art n'y peut rien, seul tu peux le flétrir,
Prête un charme à mes pleurs qui puisse l'attendrir.’³

In her scene with Jason Médée first appeals to his gratitude to her, then, as this fails, to his love, and to the love he bears to their children. When she hears that Jason means

¹ Act II. sc. 1.

² Act II. sc. 3.

³ Act II. sc. 4.

to take the children from her she swears bitter vengeance. And in the rest of the play we see the conflict in Médée's mind between her maternal love and the desire she feels to revenge herself on Jason. Créuse, in contrast with Médée, expresses a strictly conventional and regulated affection to Jason :

'Mon cœur suit mon devoir : tous mes soins, tous mes vœux

N'aspirent qu'à vous plaire et qu'à vous rendre heureux.'¹

Jason in his attitude to Créuse is also on entirely natural lines. He assures her that the other love was an obsession, the feeling he has for her is the only true love, that which turns out fears and conquers death :

'D'une pressante ardeur l'extrême violence
Surmonta ma raison, força ma résistance ;
Et je sentis enfin que, jusques à ce jour,
Je n'avais pas connu le pouvoir de l'amour.'²

Médée, coming in to deceive Jason, assures him that love and reason have overcome her hatred :

'L'amour et la raison ont vaincu ma fureur.'³

But Jason instinctively fears her in this mood :

'Ah, je crains votre amour plus que votre courroux.'⁴

Médée, left alone with Rhodope, addresses, in an abstracted mood, Jason, who has left her :

'Va, quand tu le voudrais, il y va de ma gloire ;
Je t'empêcherai bien d'en perdre la mémoire.
Je sais, quand il me plaît, dans l'âme des ingrats
Graver des souvenirs qui ne s'effacent pas.'⁵

The uprush of the subconscious mood into speech at moments of crisis reminds us of Racine.⁶

In a fine scene of soliloquy Médée calls on the forces of the underworld to support her, and the spectres of her father and her brother rise up in turn. When she is left

¹ Act III. sc. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

² Act III. sc. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*

³ Act III. sc. 3.

⁶ *Iphigénie*, Act I. sc. 1.

along with the vision of Tisiphone she knows the charm will work :

‘Obéissez, sourdes divinités,
Le charme réussit, poursuivons ma vengeance.’¹

The entry of the children, the silent victims of the drama, brings out the fear aroused in unconscious and innocent things of the storm of her wrath. It seems to blast them before it is their turn to suffer. After the poisoning episode, in which Créuse's love for Jason is represented as keeping her alive for some moments,² Jason upbraids Médée, and asks her how she could have sacrificed the innocent children. Her answer is Racinian in its simplicity and force :

‘Ils étaient nés de toi ; demandes-tu leurs crimes ?’³

Médée shakes off with Jason the human love and hatred she has known. She returns to the condition in which she was before she fell in love with him and with human life and passion :

‘Et je recouvre enfin ma gloire, mon repos,
Mon sceptre, mes parens, la Toison et Colchos.’⁴

Médée in the play punishes anti-social crime : Jason reaps the direct fruit of ingratitude and disloyalty. But in herself Médée also stands for all human emotion which has become degraded through disillusion. The play is no unworthy successor to Racine's. Certain modern phrases have crept in to change the style of the seventeenth century.⁵

Four years after the performance of Longepierre's *Médée*, a play by La Fosse (1653), *Manlius Capitolinus*, was performed. The style of La Fosse is nearer to Corneille's than to Racine's ; something of the strong directness of Corneille, and of his appeal to other and more virile

¹ Act IV. sc. 2.

² ‘Et l'amour seul, plus fort que les enchantemens,
M'anime et me soutient encor quelques momens.’

Act V. sc. 3.

³ Act V. sc. 4.

⁵ As e.g. in the speeches of Médée.

‘Act V. sc. 4.

passions than that of love, shows a different heritage from Longepierre's. The piece, which was La Fosse's one good play, was even less directly Roman than Longepierre's was Greek : it was derived from a play of Otway's, who himself had borrowed his subject from St. Réal's *Conjuration contre Venise*, a historical romance. La Fosse used a historical plot that was Italian in origin and he gave his characters Roman names, but drew his pictures from contemporary French life. The intentional glamour of the Roman names allows La Fosse to include topical allusions and painting of character in his tragedy ; this shows that the realism used by Voltaire had begun to invade the tragic plays of other authors. The play was good enough and interesting enough to the audience to make it a rival to Voltaire's *Rome Sauvée* which was played at the same time. Hence perhaps the damaging criticism levelled at the time at La Fosse's play, which it does not appear to deserve. Certainly in its development of character and sincerity of presentation this play is not unworthy of the traditions of the stage in France. It gives great opportunities, too, for the co-operation of the actor with the author. *Manlius*, e.g. in Act I. scene 1, shows that he knows how to cover his real audacity by not screening it unnaturally :

‘Sous mon audace, Albin, je me cache à leurs yeux.’

Then again, Rutile, trying to judge of Servilius, says, when the latter joins the conspiracy,

‘Il n'examine rien, rempli de sa vengeance.’

It is mainly in the stage soliloquies in *Manlius* that we trace the influence of Racine and the form of the classical tradition which he built up.¹ But even here a change is creeping in. It is the dictates of the heart that put Servilius into such great straits : and he calls upon the Gods, as patterns of virtue, to point out to him some way of escaping with honour from the dilemma in which he finds himself. Valérie, who stands in the play for the social ideal, puts before Servilius the good of the universe as his aim.²

¹ Act IV. sc. 1, sc. 5.

² Act IV. sc. 2.

The subjects of Greek and Roman story and of Biblical history were those chiefly treated by the immediate followers of Racine. So Duché treated the story of *Absalon* (1712), but with the exception of an expression of David's faith in God, which is Biblical in tone, the language is bombastic, and the characters professional and not individual¹: the conspiracy is described in theatrical terms, but it is a conspiracy of state, not really applicable to the simplicity of the original story. The moments of crisis, too, lose their effect from the necessity felt by Duché to introduce soliloquies at all the conventional points,² and the force of these is injured by the self-conscious moral application that Absalon makes,³ and the artificial phrases of Achitophel.⁴ Sometimes a remark that is almost philosophical in its tendency relieves what would otherwise be a trite and commonplace passage,⁵ but the conclusion is unconvincing. Absalon, dying, makes his testamentary dispositions, but David's grief does not appear and the scene does not ring true.⁶ This play of Duché's has neither the serene force of the classic tragedy nor the realism of the eighteenth century. It marks a dreary attempt to recover the interest of *Esther* and of *Athalie*.

L'Abbé Genest (1636–1719) had also attempted in 1710 a biblical subject, *Joseph*, but his reputation was made by his version of the story of *Pénélope* (1722) in which Mademoiselle Clairon made a success of the part of the heroine in the famous scene of the *reconnaissance*. The opening soliloquy in this play concentrates ably the story of Penelope and Ulysses up to the moment of the action, and in the next scenes the contrast between Penelope's troubled and anxious

¹ E.g. Act I. sc. 2, Act III. sc. 7, Act IV. sc. 5.

² E.g. Act III. sc. 5.

³ ‘Ah que j'éprouve bien, en ce fatal moment,
Que le crime avec soi porte son châtiment !’

⁴ Act IV. sc. 8.

⁵ ‘Et tout homme, à son gré, peut dénier le sort,
Quand il voit du même œil et la vie et la mort.’

Act IV. sc. 8.

⁶ ‘Veuillez le juste ciel, comblant mes derniers vœux,
Aux dépens de mon sang vous rendre tous heureux.’

Act V. sc. 6.



mind and the eagerness of her *entourage* is well managed. The dialogue, too, is lively, and the style good. There is a considerable variety in the use of the Alexandrine.

In the third act, when Ulysses enters, he soliloquises on Ithaca and the familiar old scenes, which have become the dream as the wandering life has become the reality. The dialogue with Télémaque has good points, as when Télémaque breaks off the conversation to pray to the gods and the ocean :

‘Mer, sois-lui favorable ;
‘Ramenez-le, grands dieux !’¹

When he recognises Ulysses, the words have the accent of sincerity :

‘Mon père, je vous vois !
Je perds en cet instant l’usage de la voix.
Mais, mon père, est-ce ainsi qu’on eût dû vous attendre ?’²

In the same way Penelope’s words to the stranger, whom afterwards she knows to be Ulysses, are naturally felt :

‘Ulysse est donc vivant ? suis-je en son souvenir ?
Vous parloit-il de moi ? Quand doit-il revenir ?
Me celant qu’il vivoit, étoit-ce son envie
Que mes longues douleurs terminassent ma vie ?
Ne m’aime-t-il donc plus ?’³

It is clear that a faculty which the Abbé Genest shares with Racine is the sense of dialogue. The characters speak to one another’s minds. This is the case also in the plays of La Noue (1701–1761). Though his most successful play was a comedy,⁴ yet La Noue attempted a tragedy, *Mahomet Second* (1739), which preceded Voltaire’s *Mahomet*, and was recognised by Voltaire as anticipating his own.⁵

¹ Act III. sc. 3.

² Act IV. sc. 7.

³ Act V. sc. 3.

⁴ *La Coquette Corrigée*, 1756.

⁵ In the following lines :

‘Mon cher Le Noue, illustre père
De l’invincible Mahomet,
Soyez le parrain d’un cadet,
Qui sans vous n’est pas sûr de plaire.
Le vôtre fut un Conquérant,
Le mien a l’honneur d’être apôtre,
Prêtre, filou, dévot, brigand ;
Faites-en l’Aumonier du vôtre.’

In *Mahomet Second* the phrases are vigorous,¹ there is an attempt at local colour, as in Racine's *Bajazet*, and the effect of mind upon mind in the dialogue of the characters is carefully studied from life. La Noue also arouses in each act an expectation of the events to follow. Thus in Act I he suggests through Le Visir to Théodore the existence of a mystery to be disclosed, and also encourages the latter to think of some way of freeing Irène from her chains.² The actual *motif* of the play is more genuinely a religious *motif* than that professed by Voltaire : for the impulse felt by Irène to defend her honour and her faith is a sincere one.³ The conflict in Mahomet's mind between love and his glory as a conqueror is also worked up to a crisis in Act V, when in his savagery he sacrifices Irène.⁴ The *dénouement*, though criticised at the time as unhistorical, is in its essential character dramatic. The same qualities appear in the fragments left by La Noue of other tragedies, none of which were acted. Some of them are so vivid in expression that they reflect, as Racine had done, the life of the author's age. Take for example a passage describing the court of Egypt in *La Mort de Cléomène* :

' Je vous vois à regret dans une cour perfide,
 Où règnent les forfaits, sous un Roi parricide ;
 Où la corruption lève un front enhardi,
 Et répand les faveurs sur le crime applaudi ;
 Où, dans les flots impurs de leurs fausses délices,
 Nagent de vils mortels, orgueilleux de leurs vices.
 Abhorrez ces excès : conservez, Argiris,
 Pour l'Égypte et ses mœurs le plus constant mépris ;
 Mais ménagez le Roi, cachez-lui votre haine.
 Il n'est pas sans vertus, il chérît Cléomène.
 Cléomène bienôt va vous servir d'appui.
 Vainqueur de la Syrie, il revient aujourd'hui.
 Il revient : tout ici parle de sa victoire :
 Le Roi respectera l'artisan de sa gloire.'

It is however in the fragments of an *Antigone* that La Noue's power is most apparent. He puts on the stage, in

¹ E.g. in Act I. in the opening conversation between Achmet and Le Visir.

² See also Act III. sc. 9.

³ Act II. scs. 5 and 6 ; Act V. sc. 4.

⁴ Act V. sc. 9.



the Greek fashion, a chorus which produces the atmosphere of the play : and this is succeeded by a long and varied monologue spoken by Antigone herself who describes her interview with her brothers under the walls of Thebes. The speech of Creon, refusing sepulture to the body of Polynice, and Antigone's pleading have great emotional force :

. . . Je vois le Dieu des morts,
Des tombeaux avilis vengeant le privilège,
De ses droits usurpés punir un sacrilège,
Je vois autour de toi voltiger irrité
Mon frère malheureux des enfers rejetté ...
Ombre sainte ! descends sur sa tête coupable,
Déchire, anéantis son âme impitoyable ;
Rends-lui tous les tourmens qu'il t'avoit destinés ;
Attache à ses côtés tes mânes obstinés.
Epouvante ses jours par tes clamours funèbres,
Souille-le de ton sang, dans l'horreur des ténèbres.
Venge-toi ; suis ses pas ; qu'il te craigne en tous lieux,
Et qu'il trouve par-tout ton spectre furieux.'

But in the colder plays of Guimond de la Touche, and to some extent in those of La Fosse, the speeches are declamatory and might all have been addressed to the audience from a pulpit or rostrum. Unfortunately it was this latter fashion that prevailed in the eighteenth century. Plays became recitals rather than acted and passionate life. It is this peculiar decadence of the drama which is pointed in all Voltaire's work, and in fact the public that applauded his plays seem chiefly to have enjoyed the speeches because they were directly addressed to the onlookers, who thus felt themselves to be part of the action. It is this new view of the theatre which, together with scenic displays on the stage, ended by destroying the vitality of the tragedy of the country. For natural dialogue and for the influence of one character upon another, people went to the comedy or to the *drame*.

Another form of deterioration of tragedy is that in which the intrigue is exaggerated and the events treated tend to become increasingly improbable. So Campistron's *Tiridate* (1691) exaggerates Racine's idea of a plot, and

Lagrange-Chancel in *Ino et Mélicerte* embarrasses the stage with a complicated intrigue which is only tiresome. The same author in *Amasis* treats the subject of maternal love but does not make it the centre of the action.

There is a tendency in Lagrange-Chancel, a tendency which afterwards becomes more decisive in Crébillon, to make sensationalism and not real feeling the pivot of the play. Unlikely events are connected with unusual springs of action. This disturbs the moral as well as the artistic proportion of a play. Crébillon suggests that a successful crime crowns a life of virtue : Lagrange-Chancel seems to hold that the magnitude of an event or of a position alters the moral point of view :

‘Il n'est point de forfait que le trône n'efface,’¹

and so does Renou :

‘Mais trahir un tyran ne fut jamais un crime.’²

Guimond de la Touche also errs by over-emphasis ; in his case this is perhaps more evident in the language and phrasing than in the plot. In 1757 his play *Iphigénie en Tauride* was represented. His language is overloaded with epithet ; in the introductory scene between Iphigénie and Isménie, the priestess of Diana is declamatory from the outset. The recital of Iphigénie's dream is founded on a more famous one in Racine's *Athalie* but is much less striking.³ De la Touche has occasional happy expressions, but nearly always overbalances them and destroys the effect he has produced. See, for example, Thoas' soliloquy :

‘Sans être criminel, j'éprouve des remords,
J'entrevois sous mes pieds le rivage des morts,
La foudre autour de moi dans la nuit étincelle,
Sur mon front innocent ma couronne chancelle.’⁴

In the same way Iphigénie's real distress in the face of the choice she must make between Oreste and Pylade is

¹ Lagrange-Chancel, *Ino et Mélicerte*.

² Act I. sc. 2.

³ Renou, *La Mort d'Hercule*.

⁴ Act I. sc. 4.

spoiled by the tone of *galanterie* in the whole scene,¹ and at the end Oreste's really good lines :

'L'horreur me fuit ; tout semble autour de moi renaître ;
Dans un monde nouveau je prends un nouvel être,'²

are spoiled by Pylade's anti-climax :

'Marchons, et sous l'auspice
Du ciel fécond pour nous en miracles divers,
Allons en étonner la Grèce et l'univers.'

B. J. Saurin (1706–1781) is the only writer of drama in the century who attempted with any success the three *genres* of comedy, tragedy and *drame*. His principal tragedy is *Spartacus* (1760), in which the hero, enslaved by Rome, and then conquering her, revenges himself by imposing a yoke of slavery on the Romans. The play is conventional in its presentment, but distinguished in style and language. Emilie, in describing to her *confidante* the gladiatorial games in which Spartacus took a part and was applauded by the spectators, expresses excellently the disdain of the Gaul for the applause he has called out.³ Emilie, as in the case of Corneille's heroine of the same name, stands for personal and civil liberty⁴; and for a sense of duty which is also reminiscent of Corneille.⁵ The feeling of Spartacus is true to life. When he recalls the cruelty of Rome he gives to the Romans the name of barbarian, which had been

¹ Act III. sc. 6.

² Act V. sc. 9.

³ 'Tout le peuple à grands cris applaudit sa victoire.
Cet homme alors s'avance, indigné de sa gloire.
"Peuple romain," dit-il, "vous, consuls, et sénat,
Qui me voyez frémir de ce honteux combat,
C'est une gloire à vous bien grande, bien insigne,
Que d'exposer ainsi, sur une arène indigne,
Le sang d'Arioviste à vos gladiateurs ! ..."'

Act II. sc. 1.

⁴ 'Que l'on naisse monarque, esclave, ou citoyen,
C'est l'ouvrage du sort, un grand homme est le sien.'

Act II. sc. 1.

⁵ 'L'amour est mon tyran, mais il n'est pas mon maître.'

Act II. sc. 1.

'Si Rome doit périr, m'exceptez en vain.'

Act II. sc. 2.

attributed to him.¹ And he also expresses for all subject races the feeling for the rights of man which appeared in France in literature even before it became a political war-cry. The origin of Rome itself was found, he says, in a handful of men escaping from servitude :

‘Rome, voilà quels sont tes dignes fondateurs ! ...
(à *Messala*)

Laissez donc là mes fers ; non pas que j’en rougissose :
La honte en est à vous, ainsi que l’injustice ;
La gloire en est à moi, qui de ce vil état,
Qui du sein de l’opprobre ai tiré mon éclat,
Qui, votre esclave enfin, sus, créant une armée,
Me faire le vengeur de la terre opprimée.
Que Rome quitte donc cette vaine hauteur,
Qui lui sied mal sans doute, et devant son vainqueur :
En barbares, surtout, ne faites plus la guerre.’²

With Spartacus the love interest is secondary, but it is dignified and significant :

‘Il faut, belle Émilie, être digne de vous,
Et vous perdre ... Le ciel, de mon bonheur jaloux,
Ne permet pas ...’³

‘Ah ! cesse, Spartacus, de t’abuser toi-même.
Ce pouvoir de l’amour, il le tient des mortels :
C’est notre lâcheté qui dressa ses autels.
Sous un nom révéré consacrant la mollesse
L’homme s’est fait un dieu de sa propre faiblesse.
Allons ; et, tout entier à mes nobles desseins,
Ne songeons plus qu’à vaincre, et marchons aux Romains.’⁴

The conflict in Spartacus’ mind is between the love he bears to Émilie and the vengeance he owes to those who injured his mother. Rome becomes a symbol of evil, and therefore to be conquered. He refuses Crassus’ offer of peace and the hand of Émilie : peace is ‘the sleep of death.’⁵ The

¹ ‘... l’âme d’un barbare, ou plutôt d’un Romain.’

Act III. sc. 4.

² Act III. sc. 4.

³ Act III. sc. 5.

⁴ Act III. sc. 7.

⁵ Act V. sc. 4.

fortune of war turns, however, against him, and in a rapid last act of the play he asks from Émilie, as a proof of her love, a dagger or poison. She kills herself and gives him the dagger. The rapidity of the events excuses their melodramatic character, and the play is on the whole more natural in tone than many of Crébillon's dramas. Saurin also attempted, as Crébillon had done, a romantic tragedy ; and his play *Blanche et Guiscard* failed for the very exaggeration of the dramatic qualities noticed in *Spartacus*.

De Belloi (P. L. Buyrette), 1727-1775, was also an author of tragedies, one of which, *Le Siège de Calais*, had a great and topical success, for it was produced immediately after France had lived through nine years of a disastrous war, and had signed a humiliating peace. The picture of the French forcing the admiration of their conquerors for their moral qualities was one which was greatly appreciated at the time. As a stage in the decline of tragedy, however, de Belloi's work is significant. He does not appeal to the strength either of elemental or of political passion in his audience, but develops speeches full of heroic sentiment which have a certain comforting false glitter about them, together with a great deal of movement. It is Saurin set at a quicker pace and with poorer psychology. The style is, at its best, narrative and vigorous rather than poetical, but the speech of Saint-Pierre to the citizens of Calais¹ is a good piece of rhetoric—not however equal to Shakespeare's speech put into the mouth of Henry V, with which it has some analogy. The conclusion, with the speeches of Édouard of England, is melodramatic rather than psychological.

The chief examples, however, of this kind of over-emphasis in tragedy are to be found in Crébillon.² His first play, *Idoménée*, has a plot that is partly legendary and

¹ Act I. sc. 6.

² The depreciation of tragedy can be illustrated from a page in Marmontel's *Mémoirs*. Voltaire was advising Marmontel to write comedy : ' Hélas, Monsieur, comment ferai-je des portraits ? Je ne connais pas les visages.' Voltaire replied : ' Eh bien, faites des tragédies,' and this advice was taken.

partly invented. The King of Crete, son of Deucalion, has vowed to Neptune to sacrifice the first person he meets on return from a sea-voyage in which he has been in great danger. The predestined victim is his son. In the original story Idoménée kills his son. In Crémillon's version the son slays himself to secure the father's safety. The plot of the play was not unlike that of many other subjects of tragedy, but the motive for the sacrifice of an innocent victim has generally been the safety of a nation (as in *Iphigénie*) or the obedience to a Divine command. It is a question whether the motive of *Idoménée* is a legitimate one for true tragedy, which seems to demand an adequate aim if a person is to sacrifice his life, and it is doubtful if Crémillon's plays, submitted to this test, are not melodrama rather than tragedy. Idoménée's opening speech, putting the life of his people before his own life, has an accent of insincerity in it, since in analysing the whole play we find the cause of the tragic conflict to be his selfishness. The King's character goes through no development. His fear for himself is never quite true, for in his mind he knows he would not allow the sacrifice of his own safety. Crémillon has recourse like Racine in *Phèdre* to an hereditary cause as an explanation of the evil root in Idoménée's character. Treated as the tragedy of a race the play would bear the interpretation assigned to it by its author, and it appears sometimes as if the allusions in the first act justified this view.¹ But Sophronyme the confidant considers that Idoménée's virtuous life has given him command over himself, and asks who could have made him succumb ? Idoménée expresses in his answer more than the sense of guilt which the Greeks felt before the mysterious government of the Universe :

¹ Sophronyme speaks to Idoménée :

'Fils de Deucalion, petit-fils de Minos.'—Act I. sc. 2.
Idoménée to Sophronyme :

'Tu sais de quels forfaits ma race s'est noircie.
Comme Pasiphaé, Phèdre, au crime endurcie,
Ne signalent que trop et Minos et Vénus.
Tous nos malheurs enfin te sont assez connus.'—Act I. sc. 2.

'On n'est pas innocent lorsqu'on peut les déplaire ;
Les dieux sur mes pareils font gloire de leurs coups.'¹

This is the expression of a fatalistic belief in the original sin in the race, and as such is also characteristic of Cr  billon's great predecessor, Racine. The king goes so far as to urge the anger of the gods as an excuse for his weak love for Erix  ne.²

The fact that his son, Idamante, also loves Erix  ne, and is rejected by her as the son of the assassin of her father, does not lend the plot any relief. Shock succeeds shock of fierce feeling and there is an improbable confusion of events. Idom  n  e believes that the death of Merion has quenched his hatred for his adversary, but cannot really expect that this fact should render him acceptable to M  rion's daughter, Erix  ne, nor that she should sympathise with the love he expresses to her and which makes his own fate a pitiable one. There are efforts, however, at character-drawing in Cr  billon's play which make it interesting in spite of the extravagance of the main idea. Idom  n  e recognises for example that he is not fighting against his love for Erix  ne, he is really influenced by his feeling for her and thus is combating his reason and his habit of mind.³ On the other hand, like most weak people, he can analyse himself relentlessly but wishes to be treated with consideration and gentleness by his friend.⁴ Again, on hearing that

¹ Act I. sc. 2.

² 'SophrHEME :

M  nac   chaque jour du sort le plus affreux
Nourrissez-vous, seigneur, un amour dangereux ?

Idom  n  e :

Je ne le nourris point, puisque je le d  teste :
C  tait des dieux vengeurs le coup le plus funeste.'

Act I. sc. 2.

³ 'Je sens toute l'horreur d'un amour si funeste ;
Mais je ch  ris ce feu que ma raison d  teste ;
Bien plus, de ma vertu redoutant le retour,
Je combats plus souvent la raison que l'amour.'

Act II. sc. 3.

⁴ 'A ma raison du moins laisse le temps d'agir,
Et combats mon amour sans m'en faire rougir.
Avec trop de rigueur ton entretien me presse,
Plains mes maux, SophrHEME, ou flatte ma faiblesse.'

Act II. sc. 3.

his son is his rival, Idoménée expresses the overpowering force of jealousy :

‘Dans le nom de rival tout nom est confondu.’¹

Even in the scene of his son’s death, the king of Crete reproaches the gods, and not himself, for having led to this tragedy. It would almost seem as if Crémillon had depicted the type of weakness that is fatally followed by strange events and cruelties through which others suffer. To the sufferers an inexorable fate seems to lie behind their injuries, to the audience it is clear that the original weakness of character is the crime. It is to be regretted that the last scene between the father and son is so lacking in artistic restraint as to be almost intolerable, and it does not do justice to the fine idea behind the play.

The story of *Atréa et Thyeste* as treated by Crémillon was especially suitable to the fierce play and counter-play of passion which he invoked. It was represented in 1707, and its success rather unfortunately decided the type of subject to which Crémillon afterwards gave himself. In the first act Crémillon traces the relationship of blood and the instincts of hate and love which are found among the members of the house of Atreus. In the second act Thyeste is the victim of the fatal dream which his daughter Théodamie treats as an illusion ; the love she already bears to Plisthène having bound her to Chalcis. She consents, however, to ask Atréa for a ship by which she and her father can leave the country, and there is a very energetic and well-conceived scene between Théodamie and Atréa, after which the latter forces Thyeste to appear before him.² Atréa is represented as the tyrant over the souls of his niece Théodamie, his brother Thyeste, and the unhappy Plisthène, who is really his brother’s son, though reputed to be Atréa’s. It is in the third act, when Atréa is preparing his *coup*, that we see the real defect of the piece. Atréa’s motives are revenge for his wife’s faithlessness, and hatred of her lover and her child, but there is in his nature a cruelty and vainglory that are below the level of humanity,

¹ Act III. sc. 5.

² Act II. sc. 2.

and the whole tragedy is lowered in tone by Atréée's desire to excel all other inhuman crimes :

‘Courons tout préparer ; et par un coup funeste,
Surpassons, s'il te peut, les crimes de Thyeste.’¹

It is difficult to imagine that the best actor could deal successfully with this speech. Théodamie manages to keep a superb demeanour, and while leaning on Plissthène, whom she trusts, she sees that the older men need to be saved from themselves and from one another.² Plissthène, in the momentary calm of the apparent reconciliation of the brothers, feels instinctively the under-current of danger. The last act has dramatic power. When Thyeste recoils before the cup of blood and Atréée says to him : ‘ Méconnais-tu ce sang ? ’ Thyeste’s answer is : ‘ Je reconnaiss mon frère.’³

The last words of Atréée are well-imagined and leave, as is desired, the impression of tragic doubt :

‘A ce prix j’accepte le présage ;
Ta main, en l’immolant, a comblé mes souhaits,
Et je jouis enfin du fruit de mes forfaits.’⁴

Crébillon’s answer to the attacks made upon him for the extreme terror inspired by his tragedy marks out his theory of aesthetic. He claims that all those who have suffered, in a lesser degree, wrongs similar to Atréée’s ought to bear the representation of the tragedy.⁵ Next he asserts that the imagination of evil need not come out of the fulness of the heart,⁶ therefore that the artist is not to be blamed for describing inhuman wickedness, lastly that it is by exciting terror in tragedy that pity is called out. Crébillon then regards the tragic drama much as Corneille had done, though where Corneille had put upon the stage the exaltation of virtue, Crébillon painted vice in a repulsive way. Both writers claimed to touch the feeling of the audience.

¹ Act III. sc. 7.

² Act IV. sc. 2.

³ Act V. sc. 7.

⁴ Act V. sc. 8.

⁵ ‘Je n’aurais pas cru que, dans un pays où il y a tant de maris maltraités, Atréée eût eu si peu de partisans.’—*Préface d’Atréée et Thyeste*.

⁶ ‘Comme si tout ce que l’esprit imagine devait avoir sa source dans le cœur !’

Crébillon agrees with Corneille in his notion of the part played by the imagination of the author. In his preface to *Electre* he explained that a poet might impute what motives he pleased to the characters in a well-known plot so long as these motives were psychologically probable in his own day.¹ He might also employ his own imagination to render a story more tragic or more picturesque.² What he failed to see was that when the note is forced to any great extent the onlooker becomes insensible to horror, or at any rate, instead of losing himself in the play he contrasts it at once with real life and regards the story as artificial. It was this particular danger that the *drame* was intended to avoid. By keeping the action on a more natural plane the audience never need lose the sense of reality on the stage.³ To readers of the two Greek *Electras* it may seem that Crébillon has claimed a great deal for his own interpretation of the play, but though Voltaire sneered at the 'partie carrée d'*Electre*,' which Crébillon had produced by adding a second love intrigue, the play, considered apart from the Greek originals, which it in no way resembles, is a well-constructed one, and is filled with feeling that, though derived from the French and not the Greek character, is true to type. *Electre*, represented in 1708, escapes from the difficulties of *Atréa et Thysête* and is a very good acting play. In her first soliloquy Electre appeals to the spirit of her father and imagines him touched and pained by the misfortunes of his family on earth.⁴ At the end of the play, Oreste, a prey to the Furies, is in touch with unseen forces,

¹ 'Sophocle ne pouvait donner à son Electre des sentiments qui n'étaient point en usage sur la scène de son temps ; s'il eût réçu du nôtre, il eût peut-être fait comme moi.'

² 'Il ne s'agit que de rendre Electre tout à fait à plaindre ; je crois y avoir mieux réussi que Sophocle, Euripide, Eschyle et tous ceux qui ont traité le même sujet. C'est ajouter encore à l'horreur du sort de cette princesse que d'y joindre une passion dont la contrainte et les remords ne font pas toujours les plus grands malheurs.'

³ That this sense of reality was strong is instanced by the story of the young man who impulsively pulled out his purse to succour the necessitous characters in *L'Enfant Prodigue*. The comment at the time was that the man's heart was warm ; from another point of view it would be that the drama was convincing in its realism.

⁴ Act I. sc. 1.

and his own name pronounced by himself comes to his ears as a shivering echo from the underworld, a summons to depart.¹ Between these two scenes we have the story of Électre. She moves, a very touching figure, conscious of her evil ancestry, conscious of the crime which lost her her father ; and yet loving Itys, the son of the murderer of Agamemnon, with what would in different circumstances have been an innocent love.² She appeals to the mother in Clytemnestre against the cruelty of the fate which that mother has provided for her.³ The part of Clytemnestre is less happily conceived. The queen's account of her dream and its presage verges on the absurd, though it is not more absurd than Égisthe's commonplace explanation of dreams in general. The recognition of Oreste by Palamède, who sees his temptations and his character through the disguise, is dramatically effective in its use of irony.⁴ The play gains as a play by the alternation of such scenes with the gentler ones between Électre and Itys,⁵ where the tone of *galanterie* helps to mark the contrast with the surrounding tragic situation, and Crébillon moves with great skill from the easy converse of love to an atmosphere of strain. Électre is the consistent character, holding the play together. At the crisis in the last Act she appeals to the duty urged on her and Oreste by the implacable gods.⁶

Rhadamiste et Zénobie followed in 1711. In this play,

¹ ‘Quelle triste clarté dans ce moment me luit !
Qui ramène le jour dans ces retraites sombres ?
Que vois-je ? Mon aspect épouvante les ombres !
Que de gémissements ! que de cris douloureux !
“Oreste !” Qui m'appelle en ce séjour affreux ?’

Act V. sc. 9.

² Act I. sc. 3.

³ Act I. sc. 5.

⁴ ‘Palamède :

Un si coupable amour n'est digne que d'Oreste,
Mon fils de son devoir eût été plus jaloux.

Tydée :

Et quel est donc, seigneur, cet Oreste ?

Palamède :

C'est vous.’

Act III. sc. 5.

⁵ E.g. Act V. sc. 2.

⁶ ‘Respectez un héros qui ne fait en ces lieux
Que son devoir, le mien, et que celui des dieux.’

Act V. sc. 4.

considered to be Cr  billon's *chef-d'œuvre*, the author has borrowed some of the circumstances of the plot from the *Annals* of Tacitus, but the play which he has produced is simple in effect, though extremely romantic in setting.¹ The form of the title points to the fact that two *reconnaisances* are to be expected in the play. Pharasmane must recognise his son Rhadamiste, and Z  nobie must be discovered by her husband. Z  nobie, like Electre in the earlier play, moves with dignity through a terrible history of murder and degradation. Injured by her husband, whom she had reason to believe was murdered afterwards by his father Pharasmane, Z  nobie is obliged to take refuge at the latter's court. Here, believing herself to be widowed, she falls in love with Arsame, her husband's brother. The return of Rhadamiste and his fierce jealousy obliges Z  nobie to declare her innocent passion for Arsame and her intention to be loyal to her husband.² This occurs in a scene of *reconnaissance* that is strong and simple and is comparable with some of the best work of Corneille in *Polyeucte*. Z  nobie stands for a love of duty that is above all fear, and this gives her a personal dignity far beyond that of the commonplace heroine of tragedy. Cr  billon is conventional

¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, bk. xiii. ch. 37.

² ' (   Rhadamiste)

Ton fr  re me fut cher, je ne le puis nier ;
Je ne cherche pas m  me    m'en justifier ;
Mais, malgr   son amour, ce prince, qui l'ignore,
Sans les lâches soupçons l'ignorerait encore.

(   Arsame)

Prince, apr  s cet aveu, je ne vous dis plus rien.
Vous connaissez assez un coeur comme le mien,
Pour croire que sur lui l'amour ait quelque empire,
Mon   poux est vivant, ainsi ma flamme expire,
Cessez donc d'『couter un amour odieux,
Et surtout gardez-vous de paraître    mes yeux.

(   Rhadamiste)

Pour toi, d  s que la nuit pourra me le permettre,
Dans tes mains, en ces lieux, je viendrai me remettre.
Je connais la fureur de tes soupçons jaloux,
Mais j'ai trop de vertu pour craindre mon   poux.'

Act IV. sc. 5.

in nearly all the opening scenes of his dramatic works, where he represents the heroine as captive at an enemy's court and yet dominating her captor by her physical grace and charm.¹ Zénobie has not escaped this scene,² but she diminishes the poor effect by giving the true tragic note to her recital of her misfortunes³ : in which her account of them is restrained by their very magnitude.

The relations between Pharamonde and Rhadamiste are treated by Crémillon with great force and with psychological verity. The son approaches the father in the quality of the Roman ambassador,⁴ and rendered desperate by his fate and the loss of Zénobie, all his feeling is concentrated in mad fury against Pharamonde.⁵ His speech as ambassador is marked by an audacity that draws down on him the anger of Pharamonde, and when the latter defies Rome and upholds his own right of succession Rhadamiste breaks out in words that cut into the heart of Pharamonde's sin :

‘ Quoi ? vous, seigneur, qui seul causâtes leur ruine !
Ah ! doit-on hériter de ceux qu'on assassine ? ’⁶

In the last act Pharamonde murders Rhadamiste, but by an effect of pathos which is naturally expressed, Rhadamiste dying has the consolation of feeling that fatherly pity has been at last aroused in Pharamonde by this last great act of the tragedy :

‘ Enfin, lorsque je perds une épouse si chère,
Heureux, quoiqu'en mourant, de retrouver mon père.’⁷

The play ends in the romantic manner, for Zénobie is to be given to Arsame, whom she loves.

This play of Crémillon's is an example of his best manner. The intrigue is not very complicated ; the language is

¹ *Idoménée*, Act I. sc. 5 ; *Atrée et Thyeste*, Act I. sc. 6 ; *Electre*, Act I. sc. 1.

² *Rhadamiste et Zénobie*, Act I. sc. 1.

³ *Ibid.* Act I. sc. 1, sc. 2, sc. 4.

⁴ Act II. sc. 1.

⁵ ‘ Je ne sais quel poison se répand dans mon cœur ;
Mais, jusqu'à mes remords, tout y devient fureur.’

Act II. sc. 1.

⁶ Act III. sc. 2.

⁷ Act V. sc. 6.

original and well sustained ; the great scenes are imposing in their simplicity ; there is a development of character in the plot : and though the events have the violence and the horror attached to them which are characteristic of Crébillon's manner, they are balanced by scenes of a different type, and the varied chances of human life are fairly represented in them.

The failure of Crébillon's *Sémiramis* (1717) is due to the author's neglect of a law of the stage. Since the drama is a presentation of social and progressive life, the public is always unable to bear the representation in art of an evil or corrupt condition which society now altogether repudiates. Corneille's *Théodore* failed for a similar reason. Crébillon's *Sémiramis* made allusions to vice which would not be tolerated in his day. The moral teaching of the play is not in fault, but society finds that certain stages through which human life has passed are overcome by a newer moral sense, and it is only the moral sense of the age of the author which can be represented on the stage, even through the means of an ancient story. The psychological truth must be modern, or else it should be so general as to be easily applicable to all ages. Another play, *Xerxès*, could not be allowed to remain on the *répertoire* because Crébillon represented Artaban as cynical and impious. Such a type was not considered suitable for the tragic stage, and was only capable of being treated by the scourge of satiric comedy. *Pyrrhus* (1726), written after a considerable interval, is a play much more in the manner of Corneille ; it is elevated and skilful in construction, but it seems to have been Crébillon's last great effort. He wrote, it is true, a *Catilina*, in which the type of tragedy verges on the declamatory rather than the sensational, and this shows how sensitive Crébillon was to the many currents of influence of his own time. *Le Triumvirat ou la mort de Cicéron* was a play written by him at the advanced age of eighty to mark his reverence for the memory of Cicero. *Pyrrhus* remains as his last great work. Here we have a truly Cornelian conflict, first in the mind of Glaucias, the *tuteur* of Pyrrhus, who finds his own son a hostage in the

hands of the enemy Néoptolème, and can only recover him by betraying Pyrrhus who is his king, but passes as his son.¹ Next there is the conflict in the mind of Glaucias' son, Illyrus, who cannot believe that his father will not save him, but in the atrocious doubt a deeper certainty pierces through and he guesses that his reputed brother Hélénus is really Pyrrhus the King.² Lastly there is the conflict in the mind of Pyrrhus himself who accuses Glaucias of barbaric indifference to his son Illyrus.³ It is this scene which is the central one in the play and the one in which the other conflicts have their share. For the reputed Hélénus at first accuses Glaucias of delivering up Pyrrhus under the name of Illyrus, a treachery which Glaucias indignantly repudiates.⁴ Hélénus then is attacked by Glaucias who says that if Hélénus once knew the identity of Pyrrhus the courage he now displays would vanish.⁵

¹ Act I. sc. 1.

² Act III. sc. 5 :

'Illyrus :

Oui, je vous ferai voir par un effort insigne
De quel amour, seigneur, Illyrus était digne ;
Que ce fils malheureux, sans le faire éclater,
Des plus rares vertus aurait pu se flatter ;
Qu'il sait du moins mourir et garder le silence,
Quand son propre intérêt peut-être l'en dispense.
Je pourrais d'un seul mot éviter mon malheur,
Mais ce mot échappé vous percerait le cœur.
C'est dans le fond du mien qu'enfermant ce mystère
Je vais sauver Pyrrhus, votre gloire, et me taire.'

³ Act III. sc. 6.

*'Je ne suis point surpris qu'un lâche cœur soupçonne
Qu'Illyrus soit Pyrrhus, dès que je l'abandonne :
Mais vous, jusqu'à ce jour élevé dans mon sein,
Vous, à qui des vertus j'aplanis le chemin,
Que j'instruisis d'exemple, auriez vous osé croire
Que d'une lâcheté j'eusse souillé ma gloire ?
Non, mon cher Hélénus : ce fils abandonné
N'en est pas moins celui que les dieux m'ont donné ;
Et plutôt au sort cruel qu'il eût un autre père !'*

Act III. sc. 6.

⁴ 'Glaucias :

Ah ! si vous connaissiez celui dont vous parlez,
Vous changeriez bientôt de soins et de langage,
Et je verrais mollir ce superbe courage.'

Act III. sc. 6.

Hélénus then presses Glaucias so closely that his identity is revealed to him :

'*Glaucias.* Ah ! quel emportement ! C'en est trop, levez-vous.'

Reconnaissez Pyrrhus à ma douleur extrême.

Hélénus. Achévez ...

Glaucias. Je me meurs ... Malheureux ! c'est vous-même.'

It has been urged against Crébillon that the love-interest in his plays takes the second place, and Voltaire is known to have held the opinion that unless this motive takes the first place it had better be absent from a play. But Voltaire tried, not altogether successfully, both the plans he suggests, and the fact remains that Crébillon's plays gain by the introduction of love-scenes, although these do not have a supreme influence on the action. Without them the psychology of his characters would be incomplete. Conflict would exist between different interests and different persons, but not necessarily within the mind of the chief actors. Thus Crébillon follows the precedent of the French tragic stage set by Corneille and by Racine, while Voltaire was in reality departing from tradition¹ and looking forward to a condition of the stage where elaborate setting and accompaniments would give a new sense of reality and provide a new source of aesthetic enjoyment similar to that obtained at the opera, while the introduction of the crowd on the stage, following the precedent of Shakespeare, would produce a new type of contrast between the action of isolated heroes or leaders and that of the populace with its incalculable impulses. What had been the distant and fateful background of the picture in the seventeenth century was to become a part of the action in the eighteenth. Here again the stage was reflecting the movement of history.²

¹ See Grimm, *Corr. Litt.*, vol. iii. p. 74. 'On vantait continuellement les tragédies de Crébillon : et l'on jouait sans cesse celles de Voltaire.'

² Among the writers of tragedy Lemierre is credited by his contemporaries with considerable talent. In 1758 his play *Hypermnestre* attained in places to a Racinian simplicity, and is approved by Grimm on that account. In 1764 his play of *Idoménée* was performed ; but the tone was too argumentative for Grimm's taste. *Corr. Litt.*, vol. iii. p. 413. 'Les personnages de Lemierre ont un défaut bien insupportable au théâtre, celui d'être raisonneurs.' In

The plays of Voltaire follow in every way a different line of development from those of Crébillon. In Voltaire's *Épître Dédicatoire* to Madame de Pompadour on the occasion of the production of his play *Tancrède*, the author explains that the moral tone of the tragic drama in France is high, and the audience takes part in the good sentiments enounced by applauding them.¹ We are then prepared for the guiding principle of Voltaire's drama. Other tragic dramatists of the period, while thinking little of the realism of stage presentation, had depended on the psychology of feeling for interest in the piece, and this was emphatically the case with Racine. A tragedy need not, he thought, be archaeologically nor historically likely, but it must be true to the working of the human mind. Thus in the drama of the seventeenth century the only attempt to teach a moral was by the exaltation of virtue as a motive for action. In the drama of Crébillon the relentless presentation of vice in all its evil contortions implied a moral. Voltaire departed from both precedents, for he, in common with the writers of *drame*, not only implied a moral in his painting of life, but expressed it in the plot and in the words of his characters. It is clear that in the history of the degeneration of the drama during the eighteenth century, while some plays err by being sensational and exaggerated, others do so by becoming rhetorical and philosophical. When the transition had taken place it was the *drame* rather than tragedy that fulfilled the common desire for a moving play.

1767 he was obliged to keep out of his new play, *Guillaume Tell*, all mention of the House of Austria. Grimm's comment is: '... S'il avait mis dans leur bouche (des comédiens) le sentiment énergique et généreux de la liberté, la police l'aurait prié de garder son ouvrage dans son porte-feuille.' *La Veuve de Malabar*, 1770, was rather an unfortunate effort at placing Voltaire's philosophic ideas within a frame of sentimental drama.

¹ 'De tous les arts que nous cultivons en France, l'art de la tragédie n'est pas celui qui excite le moins l'attention publique, car il faut avouer que c'est celui dans lequel les Français se sont le plus distingués. C'est d'ailleurs au théâtre seul que la nation se rassemble; c'est là que l'esprit et le goût de la jeunesse se forment; les étrangers y viennent apprendre notre langue, nulle mauvaise maxime n'y est tolérée, et nul sentiment estimable n'y est débité sans être applaudi; c'est une école toujours subsistante de poésie et de vertu.'

The drama of Voltaire is so extensive in range that it is not easy to place it in the history of French tragedy except in the most general terms. But although Voltaire asserted in his *Lettre au Père Porée* that 'une scène de génie' was worth all the poetics, his experiments in drama are chiefly interesting when connected with the dramatic theory he expresses, and with the judgments he pronounces on other writers. Thus he is perpetually justifying on rational and artistic grounds any new departures he may make, and insisting on his close reference to the best literary tradition : while as a fact he was breaking away from this tradition and judging with great harshness men like Crébillon who had much more of the ancient fire and simplicity.

Voltaire as a dramatic author came into contact with the literary public through his difficulties with the Comédie Française. After the time of Molière these comedians had formed a close mutual partnership ; they shared profits in certain fixed proportions, they had a pension scheme and ensured work and privileges to the actors and actresses in their close corporation, and they gave a collective opinion on works submitted to them.¹ They were adverse to Mercier's *drames*, and refused them for many years. They made great difficulties with Voltaire's tragedies, because these works did not always contain parts suited to the actors, who had their prescriptive rights to play certain rôles, and objected to these rôles being left out of a play. *OEdipe*, Voltaire's first play, was refused on account of the lack of love interest in it, and the same objection was put forward against others of his plays. But Voltaire used interest to get his plays acted,² and while affecting to despise the attitude taken up by the comedians, he always discovered some way of circumventing them and of appealing to the general public. It was this constant appeal to a wide public that laid the foundation of Voltaire's

¹ See the *Lettre d'un Comédien du Théâtre de la République*, where the editor says that the comedians ' se prétendent une société libre, maîtresse de recevoir ou de repousser ce qui bon lui semble.'

² *Lettre au Père Porée*, 1729.



popularity and eventual triumph. His first academical conflict was with La Motte, whom Voltaire suspected of urging tragic-comedy (such as Hardy's) on his audience in the place of true tragedy ; and Voltaire made in consequence a more vigorous application of the three unities than even French stage tradition would bear out. Voltaire also appeared at first to fear the influence of the Opera,¹ which he considered to be a mixed and untrue *genre* in art, with music and dancing as external and unessential elements. At the same time he opposed the idea of a tragedy in prose, without noticing that measure in poetry is of the same nature as measure in music ; if the one is artificial and external, so is the other. In all these directions Voltaire afterwards contradicted his own theory. The influence of Shakespeare's drama on his mind after his English period, and the necessity for the expansion of drama which he felt in later years, modified his early views ; but they are interesting in the first period as showing that Voltaire shared in the French instinct to seek measure and form at the time of his greatest natural spontaneity. As the spontaneity diminished, so did the prejudice in favour of a poetic theory and of regularity of method.

OEdipe is imitated from Sophocles, and the experiment of bringing a chorus on to the French stage is one which no doubt influenced Voltaire later when he became aware of the effect gained by the admission of the crowd to the stage in England and the banishment of spectators from the boards of the theatre. In the third Act of *OEdipe* Voltaire gives an opportunity for the chorus, even though not on the scene, to manifest itself, by making Égine allude to the menacing cry of the people.² This is continued through three following scenes. There is a unity of suggestion in the play, which is imitated from the Greek, and the original plot has certainly been sympathetically observed by Voltaire. Thus *OEdipe*, in the soliloquy he

¹ *Préface d'OEdipe.*

² 'Vous entendez d'ici leurs cris séditieux ;
Ils demandent son sang de la part de nos dieux.'

Act III. sc. 1.

utters when the blow falls upon him, is filled with a sense of the darkness of night.¹ The high priest, foretelling Œdipe's destiny, speaks of it as a darkness.² Everything portends the punishment which Œdipe will inflict on himself, though in Voltaire's play Œdipe does not mutilate himself on the stage, and it is left to the imagination of the reader to decide whether the blindness is real, or is the moral deprivation of exile. Voltaire suggests too, in more than one place, that Œdipe is morally blind before the exposure and has feared the light of truth³ which comes upon him with blinding force. *Œdipe* (1718), though in some ways crudely expressed, reflected the most advanced and revolutionary spirit of the century. The attack on the human and fallible quality of both kings and priests is followed up in the last scene by a defiance of the Gods by Jocaste. The form only of this play is classical : and the same can be said of other plays on Greek subjects that Voltaire wrote later.⁴

In his *Brutus* (1730), for which Voltaire gathered material during his stay in London, we see the new spirit working more completely.⁵ In the *Discours sur la Tragédie* which precedes it Voltaire expresses his conviction that French tragedy will never be able to shake off the yoke of rhyme.⁶

¹ ‘... où suis-je ? Quelle nuit
Couvre d'un voile affreux la clarté qui nous luit ?
Ces murs sont teints de sang ; je vois les Euménides
Secouer leurs flambeaux vengeurs des parricides.’

Act V. sc. 4.

² ‘Le ciel, ce ciel témoin de tant d'objets funèbres,
N'aura plus pour vos yeux que d'horribles ténèbres.’

Act III. sc. 4.

³ ‘J'abhorre le flambeau dont je veux m'éclairer,
Je crains de me connaître, et ne puis m'ignorer.’

Act V. sc. 2.

‘Malheureux, épargne-moi le reste ;
J'ai tout fait, je le vois, c'en est assez. O dieux,
Enfin après quatre ans vous dessillez mes yeux.’

Act IV. sc. 2.

⁴ *Mérope, Oreste, Sophonisbe, Atrée et Thyeste.*

⁵ *Brutus* is the first of a series of Roman plays, in which the interest is mainly political : *La Mort de César*, *Rome Sauvée*, *Le Triumvirat*, and *Mahomet* (considered as a satire).

⁶ ‘Il y a grande apparence qu'il faudra toujours des vers sur tous les théâtres tragiques, et, de plus, toujours des rimes sur le nôtre.’

His feeling is that rhyme helps to define the poetical character of language ; and that a language like French which follows, whether in prose or verse, a certain order which is mainly a logical one, and therefore cannot bear poetical inversion, would not be sufficiently distinguished into prose and verse without the help of rhyme. But Voltaire does not examine the subject to its depths. It is a fact that tragedy demands a romantic background ; and the sense of aloofness, of detachment from everyday life, is symbolised by measured and rhymed lines. It is true that tragedy is often now written in prose : but the prose is measured, rhythmical, and sometimes archaic¹ : and the most romantic works still are written in verse.² It is probable that measure and rhyme will always help the expression of a strong personal feeling which demands a universal response, and which is characteristic of a tragic situation.

In the drama of Shakespeare, 'ces pièces si monstrueuses,' Voltaire admits that there are admirable scenes : and he also admits that there is a dryness³ and rigidity about the French method which is due to the presence of spectators on the stage and the narrowing of the space available for the actors, who were too close to their audience. The same want of pictorial detachment prevents (says Voltaire) the representation of certain scenes with appropriate realism. The audience would confront with ridicule any attempt to bring on the shade of Pompey or the body of Marcus.⁴ In these conditions the practice of the stage has injured the play of *Brutus*. The absence of life in the setting of the play finds no compensation in the action of the characters. Brutus, it is true, is energetic, and has emotional sentences that strike rapid notes in succession, as for example in his examination of Titus :

¹ See *Jeanne D'Arc* by Péguy and *L'Annonce faite à Marie* by Paul Claudel.

² E.g. *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Edmond Rostand).

³ Sécheresse.

⁴ 'Mais si nous hasardions à Paris un tel spectacle, n'entendez-vous pas déjà le parterre qui se réoré, et ne voyez-vous pas nos femmes qui détournent la tête ?'—*Discours sur la Tragédie*.

BRUTUS. Arrête, téméraire.
De deux fils que j'aimai les dieux m'avaient fait père ;
J'ai perdu l'un ; que dis-je ? ah ! malheureux Titus !
Parle, ai-je encore un fils ?

TITUS. Non, vous n'en avez plus ! ¹

TITUS. Non, vous n'en avez plus !¹

and again, in the conversation between Brutus and Valerius :

' BRUTUS. Eh bien ! Valérius,
Ils sont saisis sans doute, ils sont au moins connus ?
Quel sombre et noir chagrin, couvrant votre visage,
De maux encor plus grands semble être le présage ?
Vous frémissez.

VALERIUS. Songez que vous êtes Brutus.

BRUTUS. Expliquez-vous ...

VALERIUS. Je tremble à vous en dire plus.

(Il lui donne des tablettes)

Voyez, seigneur : lisez, connaissez les coupables.

BRUTUS (*prenant les tablettes*).

Me trompez-vous, mes yeux ? O jours abominables !

O père infortuné ! Tibérinus ? mon fils !

Sénateurs, pardonnez ... Le perfide est-il pris ?²

Take another example:

'PROCULUS. 'Vous êtes père enfin.

BRUTUS. Je suis consul de Rome.³

The conclusion of the play, the main test of a tragedy, has a good deal of appeal to feeling in the picture of the treacherous Titus, strengthened by his father to undergo the death he has deserved.⁴ Again the oratorical force of some of Brutus' speeches has some literary value—but they are mainly academic expressions of opinion or treatises on history. In the first act a good deal of variety is introduced by the speech of Aruns, representing the smooth-tongued Etruscan. But the two main defects of the play are evident. Voltaire, skilful though he is as a versifier, falls into the trap set for all rhetorical writers, and spoils his effects too often by *banalité* and counter-climax. Examples are :

¹ Act V. sc. 7.

³ Act V. sc. 6.

2 Act V. sc. 3.

4 Act V. sc. 7.

'Colosse, qu'un vil peuple éleva sur nos têtes,
Je pourrai t'écraser, et les foudres sont prêtes,'¹

and

'Je suis fils de Brutus, et je porte en mon cœur
La liberté gravée et les rois en horreur.'²

Again, the action does not control the development of character in the play. The real force of the play is in the idea of Rome; which is the ideal of her citizens, the object of their passionate and patriotic worship, and the arbiter of the destiny of each one. In the list of the characters in the play each is important only by his professional interest in his country. The idea is in truth the monarchical one, and is drawn from the age of Louis XIV rather than from that of a free republic. The result of this 'troisième personnage' in the action is that in the play of *Brutus* the patriotic idea is so strong that there is really no room for conflict in the individual mind. Titus wavers because he is weak, but no strong character has a moment's doubt. Even in the otherwise good last act, Brutus has no spark of faith or hope in his son—he even feels no great surprise at his treachery, but accepts it with all the consequences, and treats Titus as no longer a human being but a 'case' to be psychologically analysed.³ When he is assured that Titus is ready to die he gives him the *estime* Titus desired.⁴ Voltaire is in fact enslaved by one poetic theory, the tradition of the tragic stage, and attracted by another, the ideal of liberty: but the motive which made Shakespeare a national poet—the love of the people for the soil on which naturally free institutions had sprung up—was wanting to Voltaire. With all his desire to describe the Romans, he cannot translate the feeling of democracy on the stage. He was by tradition even though not by birth an aristocrat: and by artistic interest and by intellectual curiosity, though not by real political comprehension, he belonged to the new world. A careful examination of Voltaire's plays shows, however, that

¹ Act II. sc. 4.

² *Ibid.*

³ Act V. sc. 7.

⁴ Voltaire's heroes are therefore either strong and obstinate, or weak and wavering. In neither case is there true tragic conflict.

he reflected one great characteristic of eighteenth-century literature. The fact that so much was written and thought on philosophic and scientific subjects has inclined critics to speak of the eighteenth century as the cold age of reason. This phrase would be far more applicable to the early part of the seventeenth century. It is in times of political security that reason can have full scope. Where the background of national and individual life is not attacked it can be analysed with safety. But in the eighteenth century, when the old order was breaking down, people were moved as much by feelings as by opinions. Even the *Encyclopédie* and Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique* breathe emotional partisanship : so do the works of D'Alembert and others of the group of Encyclopaedists. Buffon treated zoology with large feeling ; the novel under Prévost and Marivaux and Le Sage reflected the inner strong emotion of the individual life. The sceptics and atheists were sustained by their emotional faith in the future of humanity : and the very instability of human society made it impossible to analyse coolly the forces there at work. Movement and action were the notes of the literature of the day and criticism passed swiftly from one point of interest to another. It could be sympathetic or adverse but was never unemotional. Thus Voltaire had the instinct for admitting touching situations into his drama, and for dwelling on the force of feeling. The last act of his *Brutus* is successful in so far as it touches any chord of emotion, and in his *Épître Dédicatoire à M. Falkener* with which he introduces *Zaïre* he admits in the plainest words what he considers to be the secret of the success of the new play. He has entered into the taste of his audience for the 'tender passion.'¹ It is permissible perhaps to refer to Voltaire's own experience. The two great emotions of his life were

¹ 'Si *Zaïre* a eu quelque succès, je le dois beaucoup moins à la bonté de mon ouvrage qu'à la prudence que j'ai eue de parler d'amour le plus tendrement qu'il m'a été possible. J'ai flatté en cela le goût de mon auditoire ; on est assez sûr de réussir quand on parle aux passions des gens plus qu'à leur raison.' See also the *Epître à Mademoiselle Gaussin*, where Voltaire refers to the pleasure of the audience as 'le plaisir de répandre des larmes.'

perhaps his feeling for Madame du Châtelet and his friendship for Frederick of Prussia. The crises in his life were produced by these feelings. It was after Madame' du Châtelet's death that he left France for Prussia ; and his deep disillusionment at Frederick's court induced him to return to France. The weak and painful jealousies and hatreds which embittered his character were due to an emotion which was perverted and selfish, and in this he fell below the social ideal of all great French writers. In Voltaire's criticism of other dramatists, it is noticeable that he always puts Racine first, though he has a great feeling for 'le grand Corneille,' and in describing a tragedy he always leans to an appreciation of pathos.¹ It was, too, the sentiment of the eighteenth century which first attempted to smooth down Molière's criticism of life by giving it the garment of verse,² and then to put upon the stage a whole new scale of simple and domestic emotions which could only be expressed in the prose *drame*.

In the *Épitre Dédicatoire* which precedes *Zaïre*, Voltaire attempts to make a distinction under this head between French and English dramatic practice : but when he says that the lovers on the English stage speak in poetry and on the French with passion, he is probably alluding to neo-classical work such as Addison's *Cato*, which he had learnt to admire in England, or to Dryden's, which he criticised severely.³ Another fact that he mentions is certainly derived from the practice of the Shakespearean stage : that is, the English habit of using real names and real historical

¹ In his preface to the works of Thomas Corneille, we note the following, apropos of *Ariane* : 'La situation est très touchante.' Again, in speaking of Thomas Corneille : 'C'était d'ailleurs un homme d'un très grand mérite et d'une vaste littérature ; et si vous exceptez Racine, auquel il ne faut comparer personne, il était le seul de son temps qui fut digne d'être le premier au-dessous de son frère.' 'L'art d'exprimer sur le théâtre des sentiments vrais et délicats fut ignoré jusqu'à Racine.' *Seconde lettre à Mr. Falkener*. Voltaire's sense of pathos is due to his great and unusual sensibility to both pain and pleasure. This made much of his life, including his last triumph in Paris, almost tragic.

² See e.g. Thomas Corneille's verse edition of *Le Festin de Pierre* (1677) and Andrieux's version of *La suite du Menteur* (1808).

³ 'Nos amants parlent en amants ; et les vôtres ne parlent encore qu'en poètes.'

events as a background for national tragedy.¹ This practice was imitated by Voltaire in *Zaïre* and *Tancrède*, and Sébastien Mercier suggested the same plan in his plea for a national historical drama. This became the ideal for the writers of historical drama in the nineteenth century.²

When Voltaire, in *Zaïre*, gives the practical outcome of his theories, it is impossible not to feel some disappointment at this successful play. In the first scene of the first Act Zaïre explains to her fellow-slave Fatime that all religions are alike the effect of the instruction of the young.³ She really acknowledges no law but that of the inclination of the heart ; and the play would have been as good a play if Zaïre had not attempted to reason out her impulses. Orosmane, the Mahometan, is represented as having a self-discipline and ideal of married life which is really Western and not Eastern,⁴ and Voltaire insensibly gives away his thesis by making Orosmane's austerity deny the tradition of his race. This austerity in regard to more usual pleasures is derived from his pure and strong love for Zaïre.⁵ Again, when Orosmane deviates from Oriental practice in allowing Nérestan to appear before him, he claims

¹ ‘C'est au théâtre anglais que je dois la hardiesse que j'ai eue de mettre sur la scène les noms de nos rois et des anciennes familles du royaume. Il me paraît que cette nouveauté pourrait être la source d'un genre de tragédie qui nous est inconnu jusqu'ici, et dont nous avons besoin.’

² In the same letter Voltaire explains that the translation of *Zaïre* suffered at the hands of English actors, who, though at that time learning to use only natural emphasis, still over-acted certain lines. It shows that the French ideal of acting was to foreshadow without exaggeration the words which the dramatist has supplied ; the work of both actor and author are acts contributory to one effect.

³ ‘J'eusse été près du Gange esclave des faux dieux,
Chrétienne dans Paris, musulmane en ces lieux,
L'instruction fait tout ; et la main de nos pères
Grave en nos faibles coeurs ces premiers caractères
Que l'exemple et le temps nous viennent retracer,
Et que peut-être en nous Dieu seul peut effacer.’

Act I. sc. 1.

⁴ Act I. sc. 2 :

‘J'atteste ici la gloire, et Zaïre, et ma flamme,
De ne choisir que vous pour maîtresse et pour femme.’

⁵ ‘Je vous aime, Zaïre, et j'attends de votre âme
Un amour qui réponde à ma brûlante flamme.’

Act I. sc. 2.

to be exercising liberality of spirit¹; whereas he is really treating Christians more kindly by reason of his interest in Zaire. Nérestan, too, engaged in delivering the Christians, and obtaining their ransom, evidently cares so much more for the person of Zaire herself than for the liberty of the other captives that his words to Orosmane do not ring true.² He too is swayed by the love motive: and it would have been better for the play if it had been openly acknowledged by Nérestan to himself.³ It is true that Chatillon makes good dramatic use of the situation, when he suggests to Nérestan that it is of no consequence to Zaire's salvation whether she is a Christian or a Mahometan:

'Qu'importe de quel bras Dieu daigne se servir?' ⁴

And this brings out Nérestan's fierce retort:

'Leurs refus sont affreux, leurs bienfaits font rougir.' ⁵

The conflict then in Nérestan's mind is not a true dramatic conflict. He is moved by one motive and avows another; and his moral vagueness is a reflection of Voltaire's double aim in the drama. This is to teach a thesis, but the play must also be popular and appeal to the heart.⁶ The case, as Voltaire puts it, is not borne out by the play itself. If *Zaire* were a thesis in favour of religious toleration, then it could only succeed as a play if this mental attitude were made central to the plot. *Zaire* is, however, a play in which love supplies the motive of the action. Therefore the moral maxims uttered by Zaire and Orosmane are not only out of place but are psychologically insincere: they do not correspond to a real truth in the minds of the characters.

¹ 'Je vois avec mépris ces maximes terribles
Qui font de tant de rois des tyrans invisibles.'

Act I. sc. 3.

² Act I. sc. 4.

³ 'On la retient ... Que dis-je? ... Ah! Zaire elle-même,
Oubliant les chrétiens pour ce soudan qui l'aime ...
N'y pensons plus ... Seigneur, un refus plus cruel
Vient m'accabler encor d'un déplaisir mortel:
Des chrétiens malheureux l'espérance est trahie.'

Act II. sc. 1.

⁴ Act II. sc. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Act III. sc. 1.

Voltaire too is guilty of the insincerity of reducing the acts of Christians and Mahometans to one type of social virtue : and this dislocation of fact spoils the appeal of his play. The action takes place in a fanciful land where there is neither Jew, Turk, infidel nor heretic.

It would seem as if Voltaire's drama suffers from this constant blurring of motive. Thus in Lusignan's recognition of his children, the prevailing motive in his appeal to Zaire to be Christian is really his sense of the solidarity of the family and the necessity that the daughter should be obedient to her father. It is as a father and not as a Christian that he makes his primary appeal to her : and it is as a brother that Nérestan makes his appeal.¹ Zaire is torn by a real conflict ; but it is not one between Christianity and Mahometanism, it is one between her duty to her father and her love for Orosmane.² The toleration practised by Orosmane comes quickly to an end when Zaire repels him and he suspects she is drawn to Nérestan.³ At the end of the play, when having slain Zaire and been reassured about her fidelity to him Orosmane is about to kill himself, he recovers his attitude of tolerance to the Christians and overloads them with kindness.⁴

Apart from these defects, which are inherent in all Voltaire's work, the character of Orosmane is well studied, and the shades of feeling shown by him under the trial of his doubt of Zaire are psychologically true. For instance,

Lusignan. Je retrouve ma fille après l'avoir perdue ;
Et je reprends ma gloire et ma félicité,
En dérobant mon sang à l'infidélité.

Nérestan. Je revois donc ma sœur ! ... Et son âme ...

Zaire. Ah, mon père.

Cher auteur de mes jours, parlez, que dois-je faire ?

Lusignan. M'ôter par un seul mot ma honte et mes ennuis,
Dire : Je suis chrétienne.

Zaire. Oui ... seigneur ... je le suis.'
Act II. sc. 3.

¹ Act III. sc. 5.

² 'Allons ! que le séрай soit fermé pour jamais ;
Que la terreur habite aux portes du palais ;
Que tout ressente ici le frein de l'esclavage.
Des rois de l'orient suivons l'antique usage.'

Act III. sc. 7.

⁴ Act V. sc. 10.

when Zaire is with him he listens to instinct, though not to reason or suggestion, and believes in her,¹ until he thinks that he has in Nérestan's letter the proof of her guilt. Only then does he allow himself the use of savage irony :

'ZAÏRE. Vous doutez de mon cœur ?

OROSMANE. Non, je n'en doute pas.
Allez, rentrez, madame.'²

Again, after the slaughter of Zaire and the proof of her innocence Orosmane's first words are convincingly natural :

'Tu m'en a dit assez. O ciel ! j'étais aimé !

Va, je n'ai pas besoin d'en savoir davantage ...'³

It is usual to see in *Zaire* considerable influence on Voltaire's mind of Shakespeare's *Othello*. But love and not jealousy is in Voltaire's play the real centre of the action, for Orosmane refuses to admit jealousy into his mind until driven to avenge the insult he conceives has been laid upon him. Shakespeare's hero suffers, and causes Desdemona to suffer, because his reason and judgment are blinded, and his instinct leads him wrong. It is only in the last scene of Voltaire's play, where Orosmane speaks the elegy of Zaire, that there is direct imitation of Shakespeare's *Othello* :

'Dis-leur que j'ai donné la mort la plus affreuse
À la plus digne femme, à la plus vertueuse
Dont le ciel ait formé les innocents appas ...'⁴

Alzire, represented in 1736, is preceded by a letter appealing to the charity and tolerance of artists and men of letters among themselves : an attitude on which Voltaire's own was a curious comment. Alzire, the daughter of Montèze, has abandoned the false gods of her nation for the true God : but she finds herself drawn into a conflict between her obedience to her father, who wishes her to marry Don Gusman, and her hatred of a tie with the conqueror of her country. Here again, as in *Zaire*, the question

¹ Act IV. scs. 2, 3, 6, 7.

² Act V. sc. 10.

³ Act IV. sc. 6.

⁴ Act V. sc. 10.

of religion is really external to the play. In Alzire's case it is after the marriage that her former lover, Zamore, appears, and her words to Zamore in which she admits no excuse for her want of faith to a lover whom she believed dead, are on a high level.¹ Zamore, like Orosmane, moved by an entirely emotional impulse, wishes to be satisfied that Alzire still loves him. Alzire, when in the next scene she is confronted with Gusman's treachery, sees no way out with honour but by death. Gusman's departure to the war fills in the interval between the third and fourth acts. On his return, Alzire sees that she has pleaded for Zamore's life in vain :

‘ J'assassinais Zamore en demandant sa vie.’²

The play of *Alzire* is dramatically superior to *Zaire* in this : that Alzire's prayer to the unknown God, who if He exists is the Father of all peoples, comes at the crisis of her fate, when the loss of earthly support has led her to question her own soul.³ But when she is accused and left without

¹ ‘ Je pourrais t'alléguer, pour affaiblir mon crime,
De mon père sur moi le pouvoir légitime,
L'erreur où nous étions, mes regrets, mes combats,
Les pleurs que j'ai trois ans donnés à ton trépas ;
Que, des chrétiens vainqueurs esclave infortunée,
La douleur de ta perte à leur Dieu m'a donnée ;
Que je t'aimai toujours ; que mon cœur éperdu
A détesté tes dieux qui t'ont mal défendu :
Mais je ne cherche point, je ne veux point d'excuse ;
Il n'en est point pour moi, lorsque l'amour m'accuse.
Tu vis, il me suffit. Je t'ai manqué de foi ;
Tranche mes jours affreux, qui ne sont plus pour toi.’

Act III. sc. 4.

² Act IV. sc. 3.

³ ‘ O toi, Dieu des Chrétiens, Dieu vainqueur et terrible,
Je connais peu tes lois ; ta main, du haut des cieux,
Perce à peine un nuage épaisse sur mes yeux ;
Mais si je suis à toi, si mon amour t'offense,
Sur ce cœur malheureux épouse ta vengeance.
Grand Dieu, conduis Zamore au milieu des déserts !
Ne serais-tu le Dieu que d'un autre univers ?
Les seuls Européens sont-ils nés pour te plaire ?
Es-tu tyran d'un monde, et de l'autre le père ?
Les vainqueurs, les vaincus, tous ces faibles humains,
Sont tous également l'ouvrage de tes mains.’

Act IV. sc. 5.

hope, Alzire turns, as Voltaire had done, against a God who permits evil in the world.¹ She stands, when appealed to by Zamore, for the rights of conscience and honesty against the offer which would tempt Zamore to be converted to Christianity and thus save both himself and Alzire. Gusman, in the last scene, really redresses the balance of the play. He pardons Zamore in the name of the God of the Christians.² The thesis of the play, then, is that true Christianity is above other religions in its lessons of mercy and peace.³ Happily for Voltaire's play the last two acts show a harmony between the spiritual emotions of the characters and their human love. The result is that the play is unified. But this has been done by a *tour de main* that is only justified in a tract. What is there in the character of Gusman in the earlier acts of the play to lead us to imagine that he is either clear-sighted to his own faults or capable of mercy and unselfishness? A miracle must have occurred to turn him into the saint of the last act. And Voltaire gives no sort of hint that such a miracle has been worked. Gusman's conversion happened long ago, and apparently left him untouched. The loss of Alzire's esteem is the only possible motive which could bring Gusman to his better self. And if this is so, *Alzire* is a drama of love, and the motive is not a religious motive at all. It offers, however, a singularly good opportunity for a study of the outbreak of religious despair, in the case of someone who has lost earthly happiness.

Mahomet, ou le Fanatisme (1742) is an even more audacious exhibition of a pretended religious thesis. The play is supposed to be an illustration of the evil effects of a belief in a fanatical religion, and the impulse which urged Voltaire to dedicate this drama to Benedict XIV leaves no doubt in the mind of the reader of the play that in the

¹ Act IV, sc. 3.

² 'Vis, superbe ennemi, sois libre, et te souviens
Quel fut et le devoir et la mort d'un chrétien.'

Act V. sc. 7.

³ 'Ah! la loi qui t'oblige a cet effort suprême
Je commence à le croire est la loi d'un Dieu même.'

Act V. sc. 7.

character of Mahomet Voltaire meant to put in the pillory the pretensions of the Church in the person of the Pope. Some of the allusions are too evident not to be recognised.¹ Mahomet is represented as playing on the credulity of the people, and founding his empire on their ignorance. But the argument of the play—while it represents Mahomet as forcing Séide to slay, in the name of the Mahometan religion, Zophire, who is (unknown to him) his father—discloses motives in the minds of Mahomet himself and of Séide which have an entirely different origin. Séide yields to temptation because he loves Palmire, ignorant of the fact that she is his sister : Mahomet impels Séide to his act of cruelty in order to obtain possession of Palmire, whom he loves, and with the deliberate intention of removing Séide from his path. The plot is, however, disclosed, and Palmire follows her brother and her father to death. The good construction of the play is possible because there is no doubt of the motives which move the characters in it. Séide, when weak and fearful of the results of his crime, deliberately accuses Palmire and not Mahomet of being his tempter :

‘ Non, cruelle ! sans toi, sans ton ordre suprême
Je n’aurais pu jamais obéir au ciel même.’²

The *Lettre à M. Maffei* which precedes Voltaire’s *Mérope* (1748) incidentally illustrates Voltaire’s theatrical practice in a way that he perhaps did not intend. He argues that a love interest should either be the whole soul of a piece

¹ *Mahomet*, ‘ Je veillerai sur vous comme sur l’univers.’

Act II. sc. 3.

‘ Oui, je connais ton peuple, il a besoin d’erreur ;
Ou véritable ou faux, mon culte est nécessaire.’

Act II. sc. 5.

‘ Non, mais il faut m’aider à tromper l’univers.’

Act II. sc. 5.

‘ Loin de moi les mortels assez audacieux
Pour juger par eux-mêmes et pour voir par leurs yeux !
Quiconque ose penser n’est pas né pour me croire.’

Act III. sc. 6.

‘ Je dois régir en dieu l’univers prévenu ;
Mon empire est détruit, si l’homme est reconnu.’

Act V. sc. 4.

* Act IV. sc. 4.

or be excluded from it,¹ and he takes credit to himself for excluding *galanterie* from his version of *Mérope*. But what he has not excluded is the emotional interest aroused by Mérope's love for her son, and the tragic situation in which mother and son are placed. *Mérope* is an emotional play, though the emotion is a maternal one. In the *Lettre* already quoted, Voltaire gives an interesting account of the different versions of the story with which he is acquainted, and points out that he was unable to offer a translation of Maffei's play to a French audience because the simple realism of treatment in the Italian version would have roused French criticism, ridicule, and dislike. Voltaire here deviates from the ideal of Racine which he so much admires, and clearly shows that he edits nature for the use of a critical and artificial society. Here is perhaps a reason for the comparative failure of Voltaire to impress us. He speaks to his age, but not for humanity and therefore not to us. The play of *Mérope* has simplicity of motive, a romantic *reconnnaissance*; and after the crisis in the third act, where Mérope is only just saved from slaying her son, mistaking him for the assassin,² the play moves with rapid pace towards the inevitable conflict between the will of Polyphonte the usurper and the right of Égisthe the true heir. The recognition of Égisthe by Mérope has brought about a new relation of all the characters, in the light of which Mérope moves from excited transport to almost superhuman courage, and the young Égisthe shows his royal birth. It is to be regretted that the last great scene is represented only in the recital of the *confidante*; however lively and varied is her speech, it produces emotion at second-hand,³ and thus just misses a realism of which the Greeks, Italians, and English were capable in their versions of the play, and from which Voltaire shrank owing to what he felt were the conditions of the stage when he wrote the play. *Mérope* fulfils the conditions of a tragedy, but it is one represented

¹ 'C'est la passion la plus théâtrale de toutes, la plus fertile en sentiments, la plus variée : elle doit être l'âme d'un ouvrage de théâtre, ou en être entièrement bannie.'

² Act III. sc. 4.

³ Act V. sc. 6.

in shadow-pictures ; there is a want of convincing power, of robustness of presentation. Still it is greatly superior to the other plays we have examined, in which the characters give the impression of starting on their course in the most *mondain* way, and of scattering tracts on duty and toleration out of the stage-coach windows in their flight.

La Mort de César (1743) is a short play in three Acts : more definitely affected by Shakespeare's play of *Julius Caesar* than Voltaire's other Roman play. The oath of the senators,¹ Caesar's speech, and his appeal to Brutus,² Brutus' description of the multitude,³ Antoine's speech,⁴ all have points of resemblance with the English play. But the characteristic note of Voltaire's *théâtre* appears when Brutus is supposed to be the son of Caesar, and is recognised by his father directly after the fatal oath.⁵ Voltaire has approached to a criticism of the French monarchy more nearly in this play than in his other dramas ; but he cannot resist the feeling of hatred and dislike to the populace which cringes before the tyrant :

'Chacun baise en tremblant la main qui nous enchaîne.'⁶

The beginning of the decline of Voltaire's art is perhaps most noticeable in his *Sémiramis* (1748), which he wrote to overcome his rivals. It is preceded by a dissertation on ancient and modern tragedy, in which Voltaire notices that some elements of Greek tragedy, notably the sense of the spectacle and the habit of declamation, survive in the modern opera, and he also remarks that the Italian recitative has some analogy with the Greek method of chanting. Thus Voltaire considers that the *Tragédie-Opéra*,⁷ a *genre* very much in the ascendant in the latter part of the eighteenth century, represents the Greek atmosphere better than the so-called classical tragedy has done, while he considers it inferior to tragedy because it appeals to the senses. But he immediately applies some of the theory of the *tragédie-opéra* to his new drama of *Sémiramis*. The setting was to

¹ Act II. sc. 4.

² Act I. sc. 3.

³ Act II. sc. 4.

⁴ Act III. sc. 8.

⁵ Act I. sc. 1; Act II. sc. 5.

⁶ Act II. sc. 2.

⁷ E.g. *Atys* 1677, *Thésée* 1675, *Alceste* 1674, and Gluck's operas, *Iphigénie* and *Armide*, which were contemporary productions.

be large, varied and attractive : and the central episode in the play was the entry of the shade of Ninus on the stage to confound Sémiramis, and this was to be followed by the slaughter of the Queen by her son. At the early representations of the play room had to be made among the spectators on the stage for the shade of Ninus to emerge : and the singular inappropriateness of these incidents led to the reform of the stage and the abolition of the spectators from the boards. Scenery, crowds and spectacular effect then became possible : but tragedy began to go the way of the *tragédie-opéra* or of melodrama.

Voltaire makes in his dissertation the usual contemporary claim for his tragedy, namely, that its influence is moral.¹ We shall see on examination whether this claim is any more true for *Sémiramis* than for the rest of Voltaire's *théâtre*, where the spring of action has been a purely emotional one, and the moral dissertations an excrescence on the main idea.

Although Voltaire allowed himself in the *Dissertation* that precedes *Sémiramis* to criticise Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as 'une pièce grossière et barbare,' it is evident that *Hamlet* has affected his treatment of the story of Sémiramis. The hesitation of Arzace before the duty that opens out to him of vengeance on his mother for the murder of Ninus by poison, is very suggestive of Hamlet's attitude towards the discovery of his father's murder.² Voltaire has, however, rendered the presence of the King's phantom in an almost ludicrous way by the audible groans proceeding from the tomb.³ Arzace is represented as being goaded into energy

¹ 'La véritable tragédie est l'école de la vertu ; et la seule différence qui soit entre le théâtre épuré et les livres de morale, c'est que l'instruction se trouve dans la tragédie toute en action, c'est qu'elle y est intéressante, et qu'elle se montre relevée des charmes d'un art qui ne fut inventé autrefois que pour instruire la terre et pour bénir le ciel, et qui, par cette raison, fut appelé le langage des dieux.'

² 'Ah ! si ma faible main pouvait punir ces crimes !
Je ne sais, mais l'aspect de ce fatal tombeau
Dans mes sens étonnés porte un trouble nouveau.'

Act I. sc. 3.

³ 'Oroes. Ces accents de la mort sont la voix de Ninus.
Arzace. Deux fois à mon oreille ils se sont fait entendre.'

Act I. sc. 3.

by the taunts of Assur,¹ and at the same time as being overcome by pity for his mother, who is haunted by the phantom of Ninus.² Assur, who actually prepared the poison, is like Hamlet's stepfather in the French version of the play, living in a dense security.³ But—and here comes in Voltaire's interference with the simplicity of his model—Assur the poisoner is represented as in love with Azéma whom Arzace adores.⁴ The play has to be brought up to the point Voltaire desires by the rivalry of those two men.

As in Shakespeare's play Hamlet demands to see his mother in private, so in *Sémiramis* the Queen desires to see Arzace,⁵ but to propitiate him by naming him as King and as her husband. The spectre of Ninus emerges on the scene at the moment of Sémiramis' decision, and utters words not unlike those of the ghost of Hamlet's father,⁶ but the effect of the scene is disturbed by the very personal application of the events made by Arzace and by Azéma,⁷ and it is in consequence of Azéma's warning that Arzace, now known as Ninias, attacks in the tomb of Ninus the person whom he takes for Assur, but who is really Sémiramis.⁸ The play is a great spectacle of emotion: and as such is melodramatic without any high appeal. Voltaire in attempting to rival Crébillon has perhaps unconsciously been influenced by the latter's method, as well as by his recollections of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The whole is a strange confusion in which there is no real unity of appeal, and thus no moral in the sense in which Voltaire claimed it for the play.

¹ 'J'y cours de ce pas même, et vous m'enhardissez :
C'est l'effet que sur moi fit toujours la menace.'

Act I. sc. 4.

² Act I. sc. 5 :

'Je crois le voir encor, je crois encor l'entendre.'

³ 'Assur fut en effet plus coupable que vous :

 Sa main, qui prépara le breuvage homicide,
 Ne tremble point pourtant, et rien ne l'intimide.'

Act I. sc. 5.

⁴ Act II. sc. 1.

⁵ Act II. sc. 5.

⁶ '... Souviens toi de ton père.'—Act III. sc. 6.

⁷ Act III. sc. 6; Act IV. sc. 1.

⁸ Act V. sc. 6.

The play of *Tancrède* (1760), which we shall next examine, is another effort to obtain a romantic background and spectacular effect. Voltaire in the *Épître Dédicatoire à Madame de Pompadour* explains that he wishes the appeal of the play to be helped by the eye.¹ Voltaire aims also at a certain freedom of expression by using 'vers croisés' which depart from the strict practice of the rhymed couplet. The stage directions give a definite date to the play (1005) and include the idea of a historic setting. But the intrigue of the play centres in the love of Aménaïde for Tancrède. Tancrède fights for her to save her from death, but believes the calumny that has been uttered against her by her father Argire for reasons of state. Having by his valour obtained the victory in war for his fellow-countrymen, Tancrède, who is an outlaw, discloses himself, and hears too late that Aménaïde has been faithful to him. The grief and despair of the heroine are a revolt against the claims of her father, country, customs, religion, public opinion, and are the assertion of the right of the individual. This rebellion is strangely modern in tone.² So also is the attitude of Tancrède, who in his last hour, like more than one of Voltaire's heroes, thinks his life well lost if he is assured of the heroine's love, but then bitterly regrets both his lost happiness and life.³

¹ 'Je sais que toute la pompe de l'appareil ne vaut pas une pensée sublime ou un sentiment ; de même que la parure n'est presque rien sans la beauté. Je sais bien que ce n'est pas un grand mérite de parler aux yeux ; mais j'ose être sûr que le sublime et le touchant portent un coup beaucoup plus sensible quand ils sont soutenus d'un appareil convenable et qu'il faut frapper l'âme et les yeux à la fois.'—*Epître Dédicatoire*.

² 'Que m'importe à présent ce peuple et son outrage,
Et sa faveur crédule, et sa pitié volage,
Et la publique voix que je n'entendrai pas ?
D'un seul mortel, d'un seul dépend ma renommée,
Sachez que votre fille aime mieux le trépas
Que de vivre un moment sans en être estimée.'

Act V. sc. 4.

'Eh ! que fait l'univers à ma douleur profonde ?
Que me fait ma patrie, et le reste du monde ?
Tancrède meurt.'

Act V. sc. 5.

* Act V. sc. 6.

The remaining plays of Voltaire fall naturally into groups, of which the plays just examined are the more important examples. Some have, like *Zaire*, their thesis—such, for example, is *Les Guêtres* (1769); others retell the old Greek mythological plots, others have a more romantic background.¹ But in the whole of Voltaire's drama the ancient tragic spirit is languishing for want of the natural expression and preoccupation with the emotion of the moment which Racine could have given to it.² The characters in Voltaire's tragedies are moved by the spring of feeling, but it is frequently the melodramatic feeling characteristic of *drame*. The difference between his tragedies and *drame* is that the characters speak verse and not prose. The difference between them and those of *tragédie-opéra* is even slighter. Far from recovering the spirit of the classical tragedy Voltaire then abandoned it, though he tried, except when under the influence of French opera and the English theatre, to keep its form.

The continuation of this particular type of decline in the tragedy can be traced in some less known plays of the century.

The plays of La Harpe (1739–1803) are very much on the model of Voltaire's, though La Harpe's considerable interest in drama ancient and modern led him in his versions of Greek plays to transport something of Greek language and of Greek incident on to the French stage. This is the case with his *Philoctète*, which is a close imitation of Sophocles. His first play was a historical drama, the tragedy of *Warwick*,³ and this was followed by several less

¹ *Olympie*, e.g., performed in 1764 was a reflection of French life and was also spectacular. See Grimm, *Corr. Litt.*, vol. iii. pp. 441–7. ‘C'est qu'en effet toute cette tragédie porte le caractère de nos mœurs’ ... ‘elle plaira toujours au peuple par la pompe et la variété de son spectacle.’

² See e.g. *Les Triumvirs*, which was played anonymously and roused a criticism from Grimm which was more severe than it would have been if he had known the name of the author.

³ Performed in 1763. Grimm, *Corr. Litt.* iii. 366, says of this play: ‘Le principal défaut de cette tragédie c'est de manquer d'intérêt, de sentiment, et de vigueur. Quoique le sujet soit très touchant, M. de la Harpe ne sait pas faire pleurer; mais en revanche il a de la chaleur dans les détails, de la sagesse, de l'élévation et de la noblesse.’

successful plays all of which had a romantic background. Such were *Timoleon*, *Pharamond*,¹ *Gustave*,² *Les Brames* and *Jeanne de Naples*. Two Roman plays, *Coriolan* and *Virginie*, can be added to the list. La Harpe is at his best in *Philoctète* and *Coriolan*, and it is fair to judge him from these instances, where the stimulus of the drama of other nations was in conflict with the somewhat cramping influence of Voltaire's drama.

In *Philoctète* La Harpe wrote with extreme simplicity of language. He made use of a method which Greek tragedians employed, and which can also be traced in Corneille: that is, he gives an illustration of the clash of feeling by the use of short sharp sentences of one line each. Pyrrhus and Ulysse use these lines, when Ulysse is asking Pyrrhus to obey him and work in with his concerted plan.³ The monologues in La Harpe's version are partly narrative, as in some of the earlier French tragedies, but also partly psychological, and describe an *état d'âme* as Racine's did.⁴

Coriolan owes something to Plutarch's *Lives* and to Shakespeare's play *Coriolanus*. The apostrophe to the changeable populace is Shakespeare's in another form⁵; so is Volumnius' advice to Coriolan to subdue himself to the people's desire,⁶ and so is Coriolan's speech in which he says he cannot flatter the people,⁷ and Volumnius' account of Coriolan's presentation of himself to the populace.⁸ But La Harpe has a conciseness of expression that is his own, and he has knit together his material with care and

¹ Grimm, who approved of a good deal of Voltaire's criticism, said that La Harpe was mistaken in admitting a love motive into his play. *Corr. Litt.*, vol. iv. p. 447.

² Partly founded on *Gustavus Vasa*, by H. Brook, 1739.

³ Act I. sc. 1. ⁴ Act I. sc. 2; Act II. sc. 3.

⁵ 'Des comices vendus l'aveugle préférence
Sur mes obscurs rivaux a fait tomber leur choix.
Telle est la multitude, et sans frein et sans lois,
Injuste sans pudeur, et sans remords ingrate,
Elle hait qui la sert, et chérit qui la flatte;
Et craignant son vengeur, aime mieux aujourd'hui
Fuir sous d'indignes chefs, que de vaincre avec lui.'

Act I. sc. 1.

⁶ Act I. sc. 1.

⁷ Act I. sc. 3.

⁸ Act II. sc. 3.

skill.¹ He also gives a full psychological account of the mind of Coriolan among the Volsci. More is made in La Harpe's play than in Shakespeare's of the strong family tie which disposes Coriolan to obey his mother Véturie; it is unquestionably a deeper feeling with him than either patriotism, honour, or revenge.

La Harpe said of his own plays, 'Si je n'ai pas contribué aux progrès de l'art dramatique, on ne peut m'accuser d'en avoir accéléré la décadence.' Later generations will admit this judgment in the case of the two plays examined, but where La Harpe has followed Voltaire, he has merely accentuated the tendencies of his master. This is the case too with his *drame, Mélanie*; which followed instead of leading public taste.

The last ten years of the eighteenth century ought rather to be considered as the beginning of a new era than as the end of the old. The tragedies that were produced after the Revolution are singularly diverse in quality and in aim; they are all tentative, and mark out no definite programme. Without doubt the translations and imitations of Shakespeare were having an effect on France independently of Voltaire's treatment of Shakespeare's plots and characterization. J. F. Ducus (1733–1816), a native of Versailles, formed his taste at first upon Corneille and Racine, and then having discovered Shakespeare, in Le Tourneur's translation, he attempted a representation in alexandrines of Shakespeare's plays, in which he used the invention of the original author with considerable skill, and gave the French public what they could bear to accept at that moment of an alien art. His first attempt was *Hamlet* (1769), which had a very great success. In spite of the conventionalism of the phrasing a good deal of the original

¹ See e.g.

'Véturie. Sans suites, sans secours, sans ressource certaine? ...

Coriolan. Non, je ne veux de Rome emporter que sa haine,
Sa haine me suffit.'

Act II. sc. 3.

And again :

'*Coriolan.* '... Frappe : j'ai trop vécu.'

Act III. sc. 3.

vigour of the play is transmitted,¹ and it gave the French public a new sensation, that of the natural expression of emotion in the subsidiary characters of a play.² In Shakespeare's play the sense of the responsibility for avenging the murder, which crushes Hamlet, also disturbs the moral and emotional atmosphere of every character, either directly through Hamlet, the King and Queen, or indirectly through Ophelia and through the minor characters. French tragedy had treated the lesser personages as shadows and 'other selves,' echoing one side or another of the great struggle; and this was due to the influence of Racine's tragic method, which had concentrated the interest of the conflict in the central personages. Ducis' *Hamlet* dispersed the interest and thus widened the general appeal of the play.³ The reflective monologues in *Hamlet* are reproduced with modifications in Ducis' version; this accustomed an audience to psychology on the stage and to a monologue which was not only ejaculatory or narrative.⁴ The version of Ducis ends by Hamlet taking up the responsibility of kingship:

'Mes malheurs sont comblés, mais ma vertu me reste,
Mais je suis homme et roi ; réservé pour souffrir,
Je saurai vivre encor ; je fais plus que mourir.'⁵

¹ Though Ducis used Le Tourneur's translation and did not go direct to the original.

² See e.g. Act III, sc. 3;

'Claudius.'

Madame,

Le prince ignore tout.

Gertrude.

Le trouble est dans mon âme.'

³ See Act II, scs. 1, 5; Act III, sc. 6; Act IV, sc. 2.

⁴ Hamlet's most famous soliloquy is thus rendered:—

'Mourrons. Que craindre encor quand on a cessé d'être ?
La mort ... c'est le sommeil ... c'est un réveil peut-être.
Peut-être ... Ah ! c'est ce mot qui glace épouvanté
L'homme au bord du cercueil par le doute arrêté.
Devant ce vaste abîme il se jette en arrière,
Ressaisit l'existence, et s'attache à la terre.
Dans nos troubles pressants, qui peut nous avertir
Des secrets de ce monde où tout va s'engloutir ?
Sans l'effroi qu'il inspire, et la terreur sacrée
Qui défend son passage et siège à son entrée
Combien de malheureux iraient dans le tombeau,
De leurs longues douleurs déposer le fardeau ?'

⁵ Act V. sc. 9.

Ducis has left out the scene with the grave-diggers, and substituted for the play-scene a questioning of Gertrude by Hamlet, and the test of an oath on the urn which contains her late husband's ashes.

In Ducis' other versions, e.g. in *Macbeth*, there is the same kind of re-arrangement. Lady Macbeth is called Frédégonde, and the sleep-walking scene loses in simplicity through the introduction of lines describing Frédégonde's attachment to her children and desire to see them on the throne.¹ The scene with the porter is left out and that with the witches much reduced. There is a desire to account for everything, which in Ducis' play destroys a good deal of the atmosphere of fate and terror. But the play, like *Hamlet*, accustomed a French audience to real self-revelation on the part of the characters.

In 1795 Ducis put upon the French stage a drama of his own composition, *Abufar ou La Famille Arabe*, in which the effects of the freedom he had studied in Shakespeare are very noticeable. The stage directions for the setting of the first act are very full, and include elaborate scenery to represent stretches of fertile and of desert country; and the play is intended to describe the simplicity of nomad and of peasant life in contrast with the civilisation of towns. Ducis treats in this play subjects which were of general interest at the time, and thus neither in background nor in plot is the play on the usual lines. The intrigue is slight, and concerns the innocent love of Farhan for Saléma, which overwhelms them both with the sense of guilt as they wrongly believe themselves to be brother and sister. Round this plot is woven the description of patriarchal manners, the horror of sin shown by Abufar,² the sense of worship,³ the nobility of work,⁴ the feeling of happiness that comes from the common life and tasks fulfilled in common.⁵

There is a great deal of eighteenth-century idealism in this play, with its assertion of the right to live, to work

¹ This scene is absurdly marred by the stage directions, which note that Lady Macbeth comes in smelling her hand; twice over, too, she scratches and rubs it in the effort to get off the stain of blood.

² Act IV. sc. 9, and *passim*.

⁴ Act I. ses. 1, 3.

³ Act I. sc. 3.

⁵ Act I. sc. 5.

and to be happy in close touch with nature and in freedom from all restrictions. The speech of Pharasmin, the Persian courtier, who is captured by the Arabs and learns to love their life, expresses what in 1795 the idealist wished to believe was the true view of the Revolution which had just occurred.¹

Another character, Farhan, expresses the desire of France in the eighteenth century for intercourse with other nations and other minds : and for the cosmopolitan ideal of literature which was to have so much effect in the nineteenth century.² The claim is the immense one of having seized

¹ ‘*Odeide.*

La faveur de Cambyses, un palais ...

Pharasmin.

Je l'ai fui.

Combien j'en ai connu la splendeur et l'ennui !
Las de voir de trop près l'éclat du diadème,
De me chercher toujours sans me trouver moi-même,
Mais sans perdre jamais tous ces vains préjugés,
Ces besoins de l'orgueil dont les grands sont chargés,
Entraînés vers les camps par le droit de la guerre,
Sous ce ciel embrasé j'ai suivi votre père.
C'est là que sous ses lois, privé de tout secours,
J'ai désappris l'orgueil et le faste des cours :
Que, loin du vice heureux, de l'oisive opulence,
Soumis à mes travaux, aimant ma dépendance,
A l'école des mœurs et de la pauvreté
J'ai senti le bienfait de mon adversité.
Je fus un homme enfin. Mon épaulé tremblante
Se courbe fièrement sous la hache pesante.’—Act I. sc. 5.

² ‘Je dis que le destin, que le ciel dans mon âme
Versa de nos climats et l'ardeur et la flamme,
Qu'un besoin fatigant, un désir furieux
De sortir de moi-même et de voir d'autres cieux,
Un de ces mouvements qui commandant en maître
Que l'instinct nous inspire, ou la raison peut-être,
M'ont emporté partout dans ces champs fécondés
Par les trésors du Nil dont ils sont inondés,
Sous ces affreux rochers battus par la tempête,
Où ce fleuve s'enfonce et cache encor sa tête.
J'ai couru les déserts et les palais des rois,
Observé chaque peuple, et leur culte, et leurs lois,
Leurs trésors, leurs soldats, leurs mœurs, leurs origines,
Visité des tombeaux, des temples, des ruines ;
Quelquefois sur l'Atlas médité près des cieux
L'Eternité du temps, l'immensité des lieux.
C'est là que, m'emparant de la nature entière ...’—Act II. sc. 7.

nature and made it all his own : Farhan has travelled and has learnt not only to know men and things but actually to possess the world through the power of mind.

The moral precepts uttered by Abufar in the play chiefly enforce the sense of duty to the family. Utopia has no politics. The theory is that of the simple life working freely : it is Rousseau's, and is a reflection of all the mass of literature and thought that in the eighteenth century centred in the same idea.¹ But the unit in Ducis' plays is the family, not the individual : and this points to a cleavage which had taken place in the eighteenth century between Voltaire's and Rousseau's idea of freedom ; that of Rousseau involved, it is true, in the *Contrat social*, the consent of the individual to an organized life, but the general tendency was to make the individual the political unit. Thus the most advanced among the reformers who followed Rousseau were in favour of self-chosen groups, clubs or associations, in which the individual could best express his aims ; and the development of such societies had been a mark of the early days of the Revolution. But Turgot, Voltaire, and others of their school had seen that this individualism was a menace to family life, and they put all their strength into urging that the family, and not the individual, was the true social unit. It would be difficult to bring home to the uneducated individual a sense of political morality : he could only learn this through his sense of duty to those who were near to him, and then apply what he had learnt to greater charities and to greater self-abnegations and efforts. In the literature of the eighteenth century the drama follows on the whole the line of thought that was closest to Voltaire's view : the novel under Prévost and Le Sage had anticipated some of the excitable individualist view that was concentrated and expressed once and for all by Rousseau. Thus, in the very days of the Revolution, not only tragedy, but also comedy and *drame* show a sanity of moral view and a moderation of tone that are not shared either by the novel or by the political pamphlet.

¹ The play is not free from great absurdities recalling the sentimental scenes which characterise Rousseau. See e.g. Act I. sc. 3.

The theology of the later tragedies we are describing may be broad or vague, but their moral tone was high, and prescribed the fulfilment of near duties.

Legouvé (1764–1812), in his pastoral tragedy *La Mort d'Abel*¹ produced in 1792, chose for the setting of his play a part of Mesopotamia ‘à quelque distance du paradis terrestre, autrement appelé le jardin d'Eden.’ The play is not interesting in itself, but it may be noticed as affording the greatest possible contrast to the state of men's minds at the time, and as encouraging, as Ducis had done, a simple self-governing habit of life. But the plays of two other writers, Chénier and Lemercier, are more significant.

Marie-Joseph Chénier (1764–1811), brother of the more famous André Chénier, was drawn to tragedy as his brother was to lyric poetry. His first important play was produced some months only after the taking of the Bastille; and as Chénier was a politician as well as a man of letters, it was inevitable that the play should bear some mark of his views.

Charles IX, ou la Saint-Barthélemy (1798), was a denunciation of the tyranny that was represented in concrete form to the people by the actual edifice of the Bastille. Chénier's strong republican tendency gave his play a warmth of reality that was of his own day; the thoughts of 1789 were clothed externally in the story of St. Bartholomew's Day. In *Charles IX* the conflict centres in the nature of the weak King,² to whom Catherine acts as an evil genius and Coligni as a good angel. The scene of Charles' yielding is extraordinarily vigorous and tense.³ The King's soliloquy in Act IV. sc. 1, where he sees what the effect of his action will be, is probably influenced by Shakespeare, and illustrates the fact that Ducis had introduced the psychological monologue on to the French stage. Together with the attack on absolute monarchy we find an attack on Rome, for Chénier saw only too clearly the part that the Church

¹ The plot was imitated from a work of Gessner's.

² The play was at first censored, but after 1791 neither the King nor the Church was able to enforce its decision.

³ Act II. sc. 4.

had played in oppressing the people and inflaming party spirit and producing wars of religion.¹

As a play, *Charles IX* is still somewhat under the influence of Voltaire. This is noticeable in the scene where L'Hôpital comes to tell Henri of the massacre, and falls into the Voltairean narrative style. But the play has its own force apart from the political application.² In fact justice is hardly done to Chénier, if the success of his tragedies is put down to their significance in the political order. His vision of France, which dominates his whole 'théâtre,' expresses an ideal beyond that of the majority of writers of his day. In *Charles IX* he suggested a closer co-operation of the nations of Europe for the common good³: in *Timoléon* he risked the failure of his play by attacking tyranny, whether on the part of the people or the ruler⁴:

‘Songeons que la terreur ne fait que des esclaves ;
Et n'oubliions jamais que sans humanité
Il n'est point de loi juste et point de liberté.’

He emphasised his point by printing with the play an Ode against the tyranny of Robespierre,⁵ in which he arraigned Robespierre's crimes against the state :

‘Liberté des Français, que d'infâmes complots
Ont ralenti ta noble course !

.
La Liberté marche au cercueil :
Les lois l'accompagnent voilées.’

The spirit of Chénier was in the invocation of liberty and the opposition to anarchy. For this reason he was ordered to burn the sheets of *Timoléon*.⁶

¹ ‘Ils n'étaient que sujets. Qui les a rendus maîtres ?’

‘Faut-il nous étonner si les peuples lassés,
Sous l'inflexible joug tant de fois terrassés,
Par les décrets de Rome assassinés sans cesse,
Dès qu'on osa contre elle appuyer leur faiblesse . . . ?’

Act III. sc. 2.

² See in further illustration of allusions to the monarchy in *Charles IX*, Appendix, pp. 195-198.

³ Act II. sc. 3.

⁴ Act II. sc. 6.

⁵ *Ode sur la situation de la République française durant l'oligarchie de Robespierre et de ses complices.*

⁶ A copy was saved by the actress, Mlle. Vestris.

His other plays, *Fénelon*, *Cyrus*, *Caius Gracchus*, *Henri VIII*, *La Mort de Calas*, are all marked by the same high-minded conviction : but they differ in the appeal they make. Like all playwrights of the classical school Chénier took great incidents in history and legend that had been the subjects of many plays, and treated them in an individual way. But he also attempted subjects of contemporary interest, as in *La Mort de Calas*, or subjects from French and foreign history : *Fénelon*, *Philip II*. He thus recognised the necessity in tragedy of a romantic background to a strong situation, and also of the appeal to present experience, which he skilfully combined with the setting and the plots. The greatest of his plays in many ways is *Tibère*. The latter was censored in 1810 by the Emperor and was not played till 1845. The date is significant.

An examination of Chénier's most important play, *Tibère*, as compared with his first and most striking experiment, *Charles IX*, will show how far he was successful in producing a national tragic drama, as distinct from purely narrative plays. In his pamphlet, *De la Liberté du Théâtre en France*, Chénier showed that he considered the function of the stage to be the representation of the ideal national life, while by a counter current the representations on the stage should affect that life. The function of tragedy, he considered, was to draw the whole attention of a people to historic fact that had threatened this life. Thus he makes his characters a symbol of the country and the period they represent.¹ The distance of time which has elapsed since the events recorded enables the nation to see her past, with its irretrievable mistakes, unrolled before her eyes as tragic drama. The emotions aroused will help the public morality of the present in the highest degree.

But although *Charles IX* is built upon an episode in national history, many of Chénier's plays adopt a more distant background. While however Voltaire's Roman

¹ '... J'avais conçu le projet d'introduire sur la scène française les époques célèbres de l'histoire moderne, et particulièrement de l'histoire nationale ; d'attacher à des passions, à des événements tragiques un grand intérêt politique, un grand but moral.'—*De la Liberté*, Sect. 12.

plays breathe the spirit of Rome rather than of contemporary France, Chénier's Roman plays, like his French historical play, treat under Roman names a problem in history that has an application to the France of his day.

The play of *Tibère* must then be regarded in its relation to the theory of sovereignty in the France of Chénier's time. To the classic form of tragedy as seen in Racine, Chénier had added two qualities of his own, which are in touch with the eighteenth-century spirit : that of an eloquent appeal to a nation drawn from the facts of its own history, and that of drama as a pageant, vividly conceived and vividly executed. The sense of the inevitable crisis found in Racine, as in the Greek plays from which he adapted his plots, is kept in Chénier. The reader will be able to judge if Chénier's dramatic and poetic faculty was equal to this new type of tragedy. The subject is drawn from the *Annals* of Tacitus, and Chénier has followed the main outlines of the story, adding however the part of Cnælius, to which he gives considerable significance in the plot. The scene is laid in Rome, and Pison, suspected of the murder of Germanicus, and pursued by Agrippine, the widow of Germanicus, has just returned to attempt to make his cause good before the Senate. He enters at once into an atmosphere of secret intrigue, jealousy, and suspicion, in which murder is the common explanation of sudden death. Tibère in his palace is the source of the terror ; but Pison and his son recognise in the people a latent power which is capable of asserting itself at any time :

‘ Tibère, à ses genoux, voit l'univers trembler ;
 Et, subissant lui-même un tyannique empire,
 Eprouve, en l'ordonnant, la frayeur qu'il inspire, ...

 Quand la nuit sur nos murs étend son voile épais,
 Des regrets importuns fatiguent son oreille,
 Des Romains opprimés la douleur se réveille ;
 Et leurs cris menaçans, par Tibère entendus,
 Vont lui porter ces mots : Rends-nous Germanicus.’¹

Tibère, speaking as the representative of tyranny, says :

¹ Act I. sc. 1.

*'Intimide et corromps : c'est ainsi que l'on règne ;
Rome peut me haïr, pourvu qu'elle me craigne.'*¹

But Agrippine, before the Senate, claims freedom for both accuser and accused.

In the first two acts of the play Chénier expresses the conflict between justice and human force. He also suggests the discrepancy between truth as seen by partial human minds, and the disclosure of facts which would build up the living picture of history. He suggests through his characters that there is a pressure from the invisible world upon the living : and the shade of Germanicus is dimly felt by both Agrippine and Pison.² In the third act the human motives of the principal characters begin to appear, Tibère's jealousy of his adopted son Germanicus, and Agrippine's fierce defence of his glory : and then in the scene between Tibère and Pison, Tibère's resolve to let the letter of the law rid him of Pison. Pison on the other hand is determined on a public exposure if he is not supported by Tibère, whose orders he has carried out in ridding Tibère of Germanicus.

Here is the crux of the play. The antagonists both know that only a day stands between them and the decision. '*Demain ! la nuit me reste*'³ is Tibère's last word. He sends for Séjan and makes it clear that the disappearance of Pison, preferably by suicide, is necessary, while the blame is to be arranged to fall on Agrippine. Cnéius, after an interview with Tibère, meets Agrippine, and their sincerity brings about an understanding. Both realise that no justice or liberty is to be found in the Senate. Agrippine, supported by her consciousness of Germanicus' wishes, decides to pardon Pison, and the conditions of the tragedy are complete. For Pison dare not accept a pardon from Agrippine whom he has too greatly injured : and he had threatened Tibère to confound him by reading in the Senate the orders for the murder of Germanicus. In the last act events move swiftly. Agrippine startles the Senate by her pardon of Pison : but Cnéius declares the truth and meantime Pison, attacked by the crowd, kills

¹ Act I. sc. 4.

² Act II. sc. 2.

³ Act II. sc. 3.

himself outside the Senate House. Cnéïus kills himself just before the fall of the curtain, protesting, in his death as in his life, against the Emperor :

‘ J'ai vécu, je meurs libre, et voilà mes adieux.
Il est temps de placer Tibère au rang des dieux.’¹

The first impression made on the mind of the reader by this fine play is regret for the conventional use of the classic formula in phrasing and language which obscures its deeper qualities. We have echoes of Racine, especially in the suggestion of the mysterious shadowy presence of Germanicus, in the insistence on the moments and hours of decision, which are marked in proportion to the depths of the tragedy. We have echoes of Corneille, in the character of Cnéïus, and in the treatment of the scenes of conflict where the attack and *riposte* are in single lines ; echoes too of Voltaire, in the large and vague descriptions, and the occasional banal expressions. But as the play moves on it becomes evident that Chénier has made full use of the methods of emotional appeal and spectacular effect. The silent groups of Senators, the procession of lictors and soldiers, surround the main action and dramatise its effect in gesture and feeling. The character-drawing is remarkable and the development of the characters under the pressure of the tragedy brings about the *dénouement*. The action is, in effect, staged between the present circumstances, where the people have forgotten their heritage of justice and liberty, and are too easily moved by the machinations of a Séjan, and another world which holds the menace of retribution for crime, and from which the unseen influence of Germanicus presses into the minds of the actors.

Chénier has told us that he had the crisis of the play clearly in mind from the first : hence the play is not episodic, but united in interest.

The new method inaugurated by Chénier was, in its turn, imitated, though with a slighter touch, by Lemercier. Népomucène-Louis Lemercier (1773–1840), although surrounded in his early youth by the kindness of Marie-

¹ Act V. sc. 6.

Antoinette and the Princesse de Lamballe, had the same republican tendencies as Chénier ; with the same hatred of tyranny, whether of the monarch or the people ; in fact in one of his plays, *Tartufe Révolutionnaire*, he clearly showed his anger at the homicidal passions of the moment. He broke, too, with Napoleon as soon as he realised Napoleon's designs on the republic ; and felt that he was protesting against the worst type of tyranny, that over thought and conscience, over moral and intellectual liberty.

This profound independence of spirit caused Lemercier to shake himself free of traditional literary influences. Thus he wrote tragedy without being affected by Voltaire : and produced in *Pinto* a new kind of *drame* with an intermingling of comic scenes. Again, in *Le Panhypocrisiade, ou le Spectacle Infernal*, he produced a long poem which is brilliant in parts, but belongs to no one particular genre.

Two of his tragedies, *Agamemnon* and *Frédégonde et Brunehaut*, illustrate as Chénier's did the desire of the writer of tragedy not alone to instruct the people, but to raise up a political ideal before the eyes of ruler and ruled alike. It is difficult to avoid believing that Lemercier, who is generally accused of ingratitude to the Queen and to Madame de Lamballe, had one of those rare characters which, without ingratitude or fickleness, quickly puts the relations of life into proportion. He must have judged the monarchy critically, not only from a general point of view as Chénier did, but out of an intimate knowledge of the weakness and inner life of the Court. We may even possibly see an attack on the Queen under the name of Clytemnestre in the *Agamemnon* ; if so, it is strangely compensated in the next play, *Frédégonde et Brunehaut*, where traits of the life of the unfortunate Queen can be traced in that of Brunehaut.

In the *Agamemnon*, the criticism of Clytemnestre by Égisthe is that she is a bad ruler and wife, though a devoted mother :

‘Fatale épouse autant que mère courageuse,’
and her excitement and vanity are not suitable to the life

of a great Queen.¹ Cassandra's inspired frenzy sees the evil of the house of Atreus and the horror of bloodshed :

'Oubliait-on qu'ici les déesses des morts
Sont du dieu des banquets les compagnes cruelles,
Et que dans le carnage il s'enivre avec elles ? '²

Agamemnon recognising the failure of his kingship recommends his son Oreste to live for his people and to know how to use mercy even in time of war.³ Apart from the political allusions, however, Lemercier has produced a fine and moving play, austere in expression, and sometimes recalling the manner of Racine and of the Greek original. Thus, in the scene where Égisthe plans the death of Agamemnon occur the words :

'CLYTEMNESTRE.

Quelle affreuse lumière ? ... Ah ! mon sang est glacé !
D'où vient ce mouvement dont mon sein est pressé ?
Qui doit donc nous ravir, Égisthe, à sa puissance ?

ÉGISTHE. Je ne le sais.

CLYTEMNESTRE.

Sa mort ?

ÉGISTHE.

Qui l'a dit ?

CLYTEMNESTRE.

Ton silence.'⁴

By a happy application of the use of the supernatural in *Hamlet* and other Shakespearean plays, Lemercier has given to Égisthe a speech describing the images of crime and of the success of an evil hope that came into his mind as a presage,⁵ and Cassandra's frenzy is remarkable in its presentation : the horror of bloodshed in the Terror must have been in Lemercier's own mind and imagination for him to have been able to paint it so vividly.

¹ Act I. sc. 1.

² Act IV. sc. 5.

³ 'A former tes vertus consacrant désormais
Les ans, nombreux encoor, que mon âge me laisse,
Je ferai de mon fils un héros pour la Grèce.
Qu'il sache, ne prenant que le ciel pour appui
Et vivre pour son peuple, et s'immoler pour lui ;
Et si la guerre un jour réclame sa vaillance,
Que la gloire le guide, et surtout la clémence.'

Act V. sc. 1.

⁴ Act IV. sc. 1.

⁵ Act I. sc. 1.

In *Frédégonde et Brunehaut* Lemercier gives up the classical story, and his *Agamemnon* remains as the last fine example of that *genre*. The new play has a mediaeval background and story. Here again we have passages of singular interest derived from the consideration of the fall of the monarchy. Brunehaut speaks :

' Les rois n'ont de soutiens, prince, que les soldats,
 Et l'arbitre de tout est le dieu des combats.
 Que nous sert le secours d'une vaine innocence,
 Si la rigueur du sort confond notre impuissance ?
 Je crois voir, à l'autel, mon front découronné
 Sous un voile honteux à jamais profané ... '¹

Again Gombaut says that the people are a better protection than the army,² and it is very likely that the local colour here too is contemporary. As Brunehaut stands for the lady of gentle birth, who suffers in disastrous times,³ so Frédégonde stands for the woman of the people, brutal and vigorous and plain of speech, with no imagination, and no fears, beautiful but ferocious,⁴ and here it is very likely that Lemercier's knowledge of the early position of Marie-Antoinette as Dauphine in relation to Madame du Barry helped him in the characterisation of the two women Brunehaut and Frédégonde. Brunehaut has a sense of a rightful position, Frédégonde's pretensions are intolerable to her. The ideal of Monarchy set forth by Lemercier is expressed in the words of Brunehaut :

' Seigneur, vous êtes roi : vous savez quel devoir
 A ceux de notre sang impose leur pouvoir :
 La foi dans leur parole, et le vœu d'être justes,
 Sont de leur majesté les attributs augustes.'⁵

¹ Act I. sc. 1.

² ' J'expliquerai les vœux du peuple qui vous aime ;
 Et, vous le demandant au nom de vos Etats,
 Je vous défendrai mieux qu'un reste de soldats :
 Leur victoire est douteuse ; un vain droit de conquête
 Peut du bandeau des rois dépouiller votre tête.'

Act I. sc. 1.

This may be an allusion to the King giving himself into the hands of the Legislative Assembly on August 10, 1792.

³ Act III. sc. 3 ; Act IV. sc. 3 ; Act V. sc. 1.

⁴ Act III. sc. 2, sc. 5.

⁵ Act III. sc. 3.

Lemercier expresses, very much as Chénier did, an aspiration to a noble religion of the heart and of the reason : and he sees too, how, in times of national calamity, faith is depressed. In the play, Prétextat the bishop urges the love of God as a motive both for action and for bearing an evil fate¹ : but Mérovée, reduced to despair, cries out for a God who watches over and controls the fate of all :

‘ Vœux trop tardifs ! ce cœur le confesse et l’expie,
Mon désespoir fatal me rend presque un impie,
La cruelle, qu’ici je n’ai pu retenir,
M’ôte les biens présents et les biens à venir,
Son crime ainsi m’enlève, en mon malheur extrême,
Les consolations de la piété même !
Sans l’avoir mérité, frappé de coups soudains,
Je demande quel Dieu veille au sort des humains,
Mon esprit éperdu cherche une Providence ...’²

Although the form of the play has escaped from the influence of Voltaire, the pathetic desire for a God who is above evil and does not permit it is an echo of Voltaire’s deepest distress and of that of his country. Lemercier’s play is free in style and treatment and the conflict is sustained into the last Act, where Mérovée dies poisoned by Frédégonde, and is able with his last breath to accuse her to Chilperic. Lemercier founded, we may almost say, the new national tragic drama on history or historic story, and this was the very drama for which Sébastien Mercier had wished. His plays mark the beginning of the nineteenth-century spirit on the stage. But it is fair to add that it was Voltaire who had foreseen this ; who realised that the genius of the French tended to a treatment of history rather than mythology in tragedy, and that Roman history had accustomed them to put political plots on the stage.

¹ Act I. sc. 3, sc. 5 ; Act IV. sc. 5.

² Act V. sc. 5.

CHAPTER V

CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM OF THE DRAMA

Character of the criticism of the period—La Motte—Voltaire—New theories contributed by the study of La Chaussée, Voltaire, Diderot—Sébastien Mercier—Mercier's anticipation of the romantic formula—The ideal of a national stage—Poetic justice—Rousseau's criticism of the stage—Recovery of the sense of mystery and the sense of fatality by the Romantics—Conventional views of the drama in the eighteenth century—Marie-Joseph Chénier and the liberty of the stage—The plea for a national opera.

THE literary criticism of the drama in France has been a fertile subject for discussion ever since the fierce battle that raged for and against Corneille's novelty *Le Cid*. Molière set the fashion of criticising his critics in *La Critique de l'École des Femmes*, in which he claimed that criticism should be the direct and honest judgment of the individual mind, untrammelled by tradition or fashion in art, and unaffected by the 'rules'; but the work of Boileau went far to destroy the effect of this healthy advice. For although Boileau made a considerable advance on contemporary critical thought, he had in the main modelled his method on that of Aristotle: principles were stated, and deductions made from them. A revolution as great in criticism as that signalled by Bacon's inductive method in Logic was necessary to bring about the condition of opinion at which Molière had aimed. Boileau had recognised a historical interest in the development of different forms of literature, and he had shaken himself so far free of the old habit of prejudice against individual authors as to be ready to arraign a whole theory of literature for approval or condemnation, instead of the work of any individual

writer. But his idea of the evolution of literary *genres* was compatible with a desire to fix them very rigidly in their relative positions according to his own individual reading of the principles of criticism. Boileau and the other lesser literary critics that were nearly his contemporaries, Chapelain, Bussy-Rabutin, St. Evremond, all claimed for the literary critic the position of a tyrant over the taste of the multitude, 'contrôleur-général de Parnasse.' The first important change in this attitude of the critic became evident in the dispute between the Ancients and Moderns. In the view of the latter party, a wider public, not only a small literary set, should judge of the value of the *genre*, as well as of the merit of the individual author. The method of judgment tended to be less academic and to bring in the appeal to feeling, which, with a large public, prevails over reason. Thus the principles of judgment were recognised as themselves subject to change and development: and the direction of the change was in sympathy with the democratic movement of the eighteenth century.

One of the effects of this change was an impatience of tradition in literature. The public judges of the immediate interest of a work of art and relates it to the experience of the moment. When the feeling of the eighteenth-century public was directed by Encyclopaedic thought, men judged of art by the contribution it offered to the progress of society, and a definite moral purpose was demanded in a play. Another effect was to produce greater realism of treatment. Boileau had defined 'nature' as the conscious rational sense of man, finding its direct expression in literature, and arriving at truth of perception through avoidance of extremes and of any exaggeration of the personal view. In the eighteenth century 'nature' was taken to denote all usual impulses whether controlled and balanced by reason or not, and whether at one with a moral development of character or tending to diverge from its real purpose. Much attention was then paid to all ordinary facts of life,—and to uncriticised sense-impressions; and the result was that on the stage and in narrative fiction there was a reduction of scale from the heroic pattern to that of normal

and even of humdrum life. The critic in the eighteenth century tended to judge of the drama largely on its own merits as a picture of life, not necessarily comparing it with the 'classical' plays of a bygone age; though the greatness of Molière was still instinctively felt by all who were considering a comedy of manners, and allusions to Molière are frequent in the pages of Mercier and Diderot. Where classical tragedy was quoted, the comparison was generally to the detriment of traditional art.

In the early part of the eighteenth century dramatic criticism is chiefly found in the prefaces to plays; later the prefaces, as in Diderot, expand into pamphlets attached to plays, and at the end of the century Marie-Joseph Chénier, Marmontel, and others, together with Mercier, wrote separate critical treatises on dramatic art.

A critic of the transition period, who saw the changes on the way, and was only affected by certain of them, was Houdart de la Motte. In the edition of his works in 1754 there are three *Discours*, on Tragedy, Comedy, and the Opera, in which he disclaims any idea to legislate on aesthetic but declares the necessity of admitting art of the second order into any literary scheme. La Motte complains that the love-interest is too strong in the tragedies of his time (this was owing to the necessity of pleasing the women in the audience), and that the idea of the unities had been too strictly enforced. But his chief contention is that an aesthetic is not helpful apart from its practical illustration in a play: and that plays made in the study with the help of the rules are likely to have 'des regularités superstitieuses' because they have not '*l'expérience de la représentation*'.

This experience makes La Motte see that measured virtue does not excite great interest on the tragic stage: 'la vertu mesurée ne nous passionne guères. Nous voulons des excès, et les excès sont des vices.' For La Motte is still under the influence of the traditional view that plays were intended to give pleasure to the audience. It is for this reason that he would admit extremes in character in

tragedy, though he says with some regret that the moral lesson taught in this way would be only indirect.¹

La Motte believes, too, that interest can be excited on the stage in characters that have mixed good and evil in them. He thinks that poetic justice is, and should be, generally done by the end of the play. He would advise less dialogue and more action, which brings out the plot, and makes it more natural.²

In the matter of form La Motte has the French classical ideal in his mind, and thinks that, as in the plays of Racine, the crisis should come at the conclusion ; but he dismisses the confidants from the stage, and holds that monologues should be restrained to lesser dimensions. This is chiefly for a reason which shows that La Motte is affected by the current attachment to the idea of realism on the stage. The actor speaking alone is, he says, not really alone, for the audience is present, and thus the monologue appears to him to be artificial. La Motte also sees that silence and gesture are sometimes as effective on the stage as speech.³

Voltaire undertook to attack La Motte's views, urging that the unities should be kept : but La Motte replied by the argument that the unity of interest is really independent of the 'rules.'⁴ On one point Voltaire seems to have conducted the attack on La Motte with great fervour. La Motte had looked forward to the possibility of a prose tragedy : Voltaire insisted that poetry was inseparable from tragedy.⁵ Here it is evident that La Motte was feeling his way to the new *genre* of serious prose drama.

Voltaire's position as a critic of the drama comes out more clearly when we consider his theory in relation to those of La Chaussée, Diderot, Mercier, and Rousseau ; for in these controversies he does not confine himself to the discussion of any one *genre*, nor to that of the *technique* of the

¹ *Discours sur la tragédie, à l'occasion de Romulus*, and note : 'Quelle pitoyable méprise de faire valoir contre l'intérêt du plaisir, des règles qui n'ont été inventées que pour le plaisir même.'

² *Discours sur la tragédie, à l'occasion des Macchabées*.

³ *Discours sur la tragédie, à l'occasion d'Inès*.

⁴ *Suite des réflexions sur la tragédie*.

⁵ *Ibid.*

theatre, but he enters into the question of the intention and ultimate aim of all dramatic art.

In the development of these theories in France in the eighteenth century the chief part was played first by La Chaussée, who while keeping the old conventions of verse and form used the pathetic as the spring of action, and thus made his appeal to 'sensibilité'; next by Voltaire, who disturbed the authority of the unities, though he was anxious that the ancient good taste of France should govern the stage, and felt that in some degree the *drame* was a derogation from this, and even a sign of the dramatist's weakness; then afterwards by Diderot, who made use of these two breaches into customary theatrical procedure and evolved plays that were free of the rules, could exploit pathos, and do without dramatic crisis. Therefore in Diderot's hands the drama tended to become a mere instrument of philosophic education. The teaching of morality, he said, is that which gives utility to the drama. There is not much difference between his view of the aim of the drama and that of Chapelain on the aim of poetry in the seventeenth century. In *Les Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* (1757), and the *Discours sur la Poésie Dramatique*, published at the end of the *Père de Famille*, occur the passages in which Diderot explains his dramatic theory. In reality Diderot did not attempt to destroy the old distinction between tragedy and comedy, but he held that a certain unconquered territory lay between them, and of this he intended the stage to take possession. There is a *genre sérieux*,¹ but that *genre* can be still further distinguished into the drama which deals with domestic sorrows and that which deals with the more usual occupations of a family.² He also expanded the limits of conventional tragedy and comedy by considering that the one develops at its extreme margin into spectacle and at the other end falls into farce.³

¹ See also Fréron, *Ann. Litt.* 1768, vii. Article on *Beverley*, pp. 217 and ff.

² *De la Poésie dramatique*, p. 308.

³ *3ième Entretien*, vii. 135. 'Le théâtre est le simulacre de la vie humaine. Voilà le point qui importe au philosophe pour le parti qu'il se réserve d'en tirer, mais aussi le point contesté par ceux qui prétendent renfermer l'imitation dans certaines bornes. S'il se propose de reproduire le train de notre existence,

In certain ways Mercier¹ seems to have concentrated in his own work many elements of eighteenth-century theory which appear to be isolated in other writers. All are aware that the stage in France gives a quick and sensitive reflection not only of the life but of the ideas of the moment. Some dramatists, however, like Destouches, put on the stage a criticism of society, describing in detail the good and evil of the present time and giving it artistic relief. Here a philosophic theory of the perfectibility of society is implied by contrast. Others again, like La Chaussée, attempted to awaken in the audience a great sensibility to emotions of pity and kindness: and this was thought to induce the practice of virtue. Then the slighter plays and operas like Rousseau's *Le Devin du Village* described the simpler life in its ideal conditions. In all cases the stage was to be useful in teaching a moral lesson about social and political circumstances. Mercier's own plays freely combine all methods, and his theory admits them all, though direct moral teaching is in his case subordinated to indirect teaching, for he considers that art is in its nature moral—and he is inclined to appeal first to the national instinct of the French for accepting a statement of fact, and to their power of artistic appreciation, and leave the moral to reach them in a natural way. This method was of course con-

bien certainement il y trouvera autre chose que de la douleur et de la joie. L'entre-deux c'est justement le sérieux, c'est à dire l'humeur, la disposition d'esprit que nous apportons à nos relations de famille et de société, à nos devoirs, à nos affaires, à nos intérêts, aux rapports, combinaisons et complications de toute sorte qui en résultent. On aperçoit là toute la matière du genre sérieux, et, comme elle est la plus abondante, la plus commune, il sera, lui aussi, le plus utile et le plus étendu.'—Béclard, *Sébastien Mercier*, p. 162.

¹ Louis-Sébastien Mercier, born at Paris in 1740, lived, thought, and wrote during the years that preceded and immediately followed the great Revolution. He was a political enthusiast, a writer of Utopias, a dramatist, and a critic of the drama. No one, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, reflected more fully than he did the astonishing belief in the coming perfection of human nature and of society that characterised the thinkers of that time; but on the other hand he was far beyond his contemporaries in his judgment of present society (as e.g. in the *Tableau de Paris*), and more especially in his view of the place of a national theatre in public life. He foresaw, too, in a remarkable way, the development of the drama which would come about through its adaptation to a democratic age, and his literary theories anticipate those of many of the Romantics, from Madame de Staél to Stendhal.

nected with his strong optimism. To Mercier good was an underlying force that was bound in the end to prevail, and truth was all-powerful and could only be for the time obscured and not destroyed by error.

Much of Mercier's theory of the stage is found in his pamphlet *Du Théâtre*.¹ The later essay *De la Littérature* (1775) covers part of the same ground. Béclard, in his study of Mercier,² has completed these by quotations from hitherto unpublished notes and documents, the general effect of which is to produce an impression of greater coherence in Mercier's theory.

Like that of most writers of his day Mercier's attitude to the drama of the seventeenth century was a destructive one. To the classical drama with its insistence on great events and unusual characteristics,³ he prefers a description of the ordinary course of events, claiming that character is more truly revealed in this way. In fact he considers that the representation of modern social conditions should displace the ancient spectacle which has no message to the people.⁴ The dramatist should paint his equals⁵: truth is under our eyes,—‘Le vrai est sous nos yeux’ (*De la littérature*, p. 26). It will take time, Mercier considers, to accustom the public to the contemplation of ordinary virtue. He notices, though, that contemporary literature tends to become uniform, and that all over literary Europe and in America the moral and political tone

¹ *Du Théâtre ou Nouvel Essai sur l'art dramatique* (1773) was composed under the influence of Rousseau, but the MS was lost, and the substance reproduced in *De la Littérature*. The *Nouvel Examen* appeared in 1777.

² *Sébastien Mercier, sa Vie, son Œuvre, son Temps*, 1903.

³ ‘La tragédie en France a peint l'homme en efforts et non dans ses habitudes, qui révèlent le fond des caractères,’ *De la Littérature*, p. 81 (note).

⁴ ‘... qu'il est temps que la vérité soit plus respectée, que le but moral se fasse mieux sentir, et que la représentation de la vie civile succède enfin à cet appareil imposant et menteur qui a décoré jusqu'ici l'extérieur de nos pièces. Elles sont muettes pour la multitude.’—*Du Théâtre*, *Preface*, pp. viii, ix.

⁵ ‘... Les tragédies grecques appartenaient aux Grecs, et nous, nous n'oserions avoir notre théâtre, peindre nos semblables, nous attendrir et nous intéresser avec eux.’—*Ibid.* p. 102. Deloit quotes Mercier: ‘Greuze et moi, disait-il, nous sommes deux grands peintres, du moins Greuze me reconnaissait pour tel ... Il a mis le drame dans la peinture et moi la peinture dans le drame.’—*Mes voyages aux environs de Paris*, ii. 250.

prevails.¹ The theatre, he thinks, is 'l'école des vertus et des devoirs du citoyen.'² It is the most rapid and efficient means of distributing knowledge and rousing the moral sense of the nation. His reason for destroying the old conventions of stage technique is that they might interfere with the appeal of philosophy to the crowd from the boards of a theatre. And when he became aware of the comparative failure of his own projects he thought that this could be traced to the seventeenth-century tradition on the stage, to its pedantry and academic flavour, which prevented the people of his time from gaining the instruction the stage should be able to give. In support of this argument he quoted Jodelle and Garnier and the learned tradition of the sixteenth century, but he did not appear to realise that the art of the seventeenth century was national. He would throw down in a common destruction the whole work of the seventeenth-century dramatists : the magnificent figures of Corneille's and Racine's stage as well as the traditional confidant—'qui reçoit stoïquement une averse d'alexandrines'—the captain of the guard, the valet, the soubrette. He would destroy the painting of types in Molièresque comedy, and replace it by a realistic description of individual characters. He would destroy the violent contrasts which made Diderot say that whenever a rough and impatient person appears on the traditional stage, it is clear to the onlooker that a gentle and quiet one is not far off.³ But, after all, what

¹ 'Tous les citoyens éclairés agissent aujourd'hui presque dans le même sens ... L'esprit d'observation enfin, qui se répand de toutes parts, nous promet les mêmes avantages dont jouissent quelques-uns de nos heureux voisins ... Il est à présumer que cette tendance général produira une révolution heureuse ... il faut après l'ouvrage de la vertu, l'ouvrage encore du tems ; parce que lui seul rend la vertu commune et familière. Il est curieux en attendant de considérer l'effort des esprits depuis Philadelphie jusqu'à Venise. La Littérature universelle prend un caractère de moral politique.'—*De La Littérature* (1778), pp. 8-10. See also Grimm, *op. cit.* ii. 332-334. Grimm in his *Correspondance Littéraire* gives a formula for comedy which is intended to include the new *drame* as well as Molièresque plays :—'La comédie est le tableau de la vie mis en action.'

² *An 2440*, i. p. 283.

³ 'Quand on voit arriver sur la scène un personnage impatient ou bourru, où est le jeune homme échappé du collège et caché dans un coin du parterre qui ne se dise à lui-même : "Le personnage tranquille et doux n'est pas loin" ?'—*De la Poésie Dramatique*, ch. xiii.

eighteenth-century criticism failed to discover in the great *genres* of tragedy and comedy that were being imitated to boredom, was this : that they represented a type of art which was true to their own time, though—except when employed by Marie-Joseph Chénier and Lemercier—not to the new period of revolution. On the other hand, Mercier at any rate saw in Shakespeare, in Calderon, in Lope de Vega, and in certain seventeenth-century plays such as *Don Sanche d'Aragon*, *Don Juan*, *Le Menteur*, the possibility of future developments of the drama.¹

The ideal of the drama which is proposed is defined further in Mercier's pamphlet :

‘Enchaîner les faits conformément à la vérité, suivre dans le choix des événements le cours ordinaire des choses, modeler la marche de la pièce de sorte que l'extrait paraisse un récit où règne la plus exacte vraisemblance, faire naître enfin par ces moyens le sourire de l'âme.’²

Mercier does in fact add that some opportunity should be left to the imagination, the realism is not to be complete.³ Here he separates from Beaumarchais, who in the preface to *Eugénie* advises that the curtain should not come down between the acts of a play, but that servants should walk to and fro on the stage in the interval, to give a greater air of probability to the scenes.⁴ Nature, says Mercier, must speak, but not shout out :

‘Il faut faire parler la nature, et non la faire crier.’⁵

Reason and feeling, he says, should dominate the action. It is interesting that he does not mention will. Therefore the circumstances that he suggests as stage subjects are really surroundings, not plots,⁶ and they have certainly been employed with effect in the same way in nineteenth-century drama by Augier and Dumas fils, and have been

¹ See Corneille's preface.

² *Du Théâtre*, p. 106.

³ *Ibid.* p. 141.

⁴ See also Fréron, *Ann. Litt.*, 1767, viii. Article on *Eugénie*.

⁵ *Du Théâtre*, p. 141.

⁶ They are, in fact, the material of the novel dramatised. It is to be noted that Diderot, Mercier, Marivaux, all wrote narrative fiction, and that the stage of the eighteenth century was largely affected by the English novel (especially the novels of Richardson and Fielding).

lately seen on the English stage in such plays as *Hindle Wakes* and *The Eldest Son*, though the moral drawn by the authors is a different one in the twentieth from that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when reparation of wrong-doing was considered to be completely possible, and was admitted as the rightful conclusion of a play. The modern play treats certain wrongs as irreparable.

✓ Mercier anticipates the nineteenth century in many other ways. Like Victor Hugo he feels that the drama should reflect the present life of the nation and comments on the ‘goût bizarre et bien étrange de dénaturer un ancien théâtre, au lieu d'en construire un neuf relatif à la nation devant laquelle on parle.’¹

Victor Hugo in the *Préface de Cromwell* reproduced what is practically the same thought—that the drama should represent the life, though not necessarily the past history of a nation. All the arguments he advances in this connexion in favour of realism and local colour correspond to Mercier’s.² His feeling that the time and place unities observed in the seventeenth-century drama are artificial was anticipated by Diderot.³

✓ Verse and rhyme, and similar limitations, appeared to Mercier as they did to Houdart de la Motte and to other eighteenth-century minds, merely as difficulties to be got over as creditably as possible. The harangues and monologues of the ancient drama, repeated in the French classical age, are however explained by Mercier as due to a democratic force in French life. The crowd in a French seven-

¹ *Du Théâtre*. Ep. dédic. p. viii.

² ‘... de la fin du xviii^e siècle à l'avènement du romantisme, on n'a rien écrit en faveur de la révolution du théâtre qui ne reproduise le sentiment ou même le langage de ce précurseur méconnu.’—Béclard, *Sébastien Mercier*, p. 335. See *De l'Allemagne*, 2e partie, chs. 9, 10, 11, 15, 18; Guizot, *Shakespeare et son temps*. Paris: Perrin, 1893, pp. 2, 3, 100; Rémusat, *Passé et présent*; Stendhal, *Racine et Shakespeare*, 1823.

³ See Diderot, *Bijoux Indiscrets*, iv. p. 285. ‘La conduite d'une de nos tragédies est ordinairement si compliquée que ce serait un miracle qu'il se fût passé tant de choses en si peu de temps. La ruine ou la conservation d'un empire, le mariage d'une princesse, la perte d'un prince, tout cela s'exécute en un tour de main.’

teenth-century play, even though not in evidence on the stage, was the final appeal of society, and represented the counsel and sanction of the Gods : on the stage of the eighteenth century the actor felt himself to be on a tribune, addressing the audience. He thus considered the spectators to be the symbol of the nation which is present, though it does not invade the boards of the theatre. Sometimes indeed in the eighteenth century the parts were reversed, the crowd led and the actors followed : the audience came to the play to find its own theory expressed and it frequently twisted dramatic allusions to serve its own purpose.¹

Mercier imagined that the authors and actors in a national theatre would be the leaders of the national life. But he was also aware that this could not be successfully done unless creative force were awakened in the youth of the nation. Here again his theory suggests the coming Romantic movement. He wishes the literary youth of the nation to read Shakespeare in order to be able to take their own line and inspire a national drama.² This national drama should include a tragedy which should be capable of enlightening the people,³ and it should be subsidised by the state ‘car on en fait une école publique de morale et de goût.’ This drama should above all be drawn from contemporary life—and thus *drame*, as distinct from tragedy, would find its place on a national stage. The *drame* would have both pathos and charm, for Mercier considers that it is harmful and untrue to decompose emotion and arbitrarily separate joy and pain.⁴ Comedy in the national theatre was

¹ ‘C'est ainsi que le public se venge en certaines occasions : il n'écoute plus les vers que pour saisir ceux dont il peut détourner le sens et le rendre applicable à ses anathèmes.’—*Tableau de Paris*, ix. pp. 348–349.

² ‘Nous avons l'imprimerie, la poudre à canon, les postes, la boussole, et avec les idées nouvelles et fécondes qui en résultent, nous n'avons pas encore un art dramatique à nous.’—*Nouvel Examen*, p. 134.

³ ‘Quelle sera donc la tragédie véritable ? Ce sera celle qui sera entendue et saisie par tous les ordres de citoyens, qui aura un rapport intime avec les affaires politiques, éclairera le peuple sur ses vrais intérêts, exaltera dans son cœur un patriotisme éclairé. Voilà la vraie tragédie qui n'a guère été connue que chez les Grecs.’

⁴ ‘Le poète laissera dormir les monarques dans leurs antiques tombeaux ; il embrassera de son coup d'œil ses chers contemporains, et trouvant des leçons plus utiles à leur donner dans le tableau de mœurs actuelles, au lieu

to be the scourge of vice,¹ and this was to be brought about not only by the natural process of ridicule, as used by Molière, but by the process of throwing a strong light on all the dark and evil places in life.

'Le propre de la comédie seroit de porter le flambeau de la vérité dans le repaire obscur où les méchants travaillent leurs iniquités.'

Mercier then admits everywhere in drama a double method of treatment: the encouragement of virtue by an example which should stimulate feeling, and the placing of virtue in a high light by an artistic process which deepens

the shadow in which vice lies. His appeal is equally to the feeling and to the artistic response in the nature of the audience. The actual dogmatic insistence on a moral comes last with Mercier, though he looks forward hopefully to this function in the stage of the future, considering that morality is implicit in all art. In this view of the necessary function of the stage Mercier was again in advance of his contemporaries.

Mercier also attempted to restate a theory of poetic justice. Why, he asks, should the good be rewarded and the evil punished in drama? It is a thing, he reminds us, which does not necessarily happen in ordinary life, and the *drame* is intended to reflect ordinary life. The main thing then which the drama has to do, according to Mercier, is to point out who is good and who is wicked, not to arouse distress by the contrast between the reward of the good and evil in the real world and on the stage. But behind this uncompromising belief in facts, and in realism of treatment, there lies the dramatic creed of Mercier himself. There can be no drama, he thinks, unless the writer believes implicitly in the essential goodness of human nature. It must matter intensely to him that ultimately good will prevail even if temporarily crushed, else there could be no

de composer une tragédie, il fera ce qu'on appelle un drame. ... (Un drame devrait réunir) tout l'intérêt de la tragédie par ses scènes pathétiques, et tout le charme naïf de la comédie par la peinture de mœurs ... toute émotion est composée, il est donc absurde de la vouloir absolue et extrême.'

¹ 'Toute comédie qui ne corrige pas le vice est une méchante comédie.'

play : there would be an absence of crisis and of general significance. The satirist who has no faith need not aspire to write drama¹ :

Again, Mercier believed in the permanent character of intellectual truth. His contemporaries found their theory of a perfectibility gained through the acquisition of knowledge, and their idea that what was universally experienced could not have the character of moral evil, both expressed in Mercier, who made the test of truth its power to bear universal dissemination. In Mercier's picturesque phrase, truth must leave the study and become 'pont-neuf' —that is, of common knowledge.²

Thus, while philosophy was teaching the equality of men, and the duty of individuals in society, the stage accommodated itself to a democratic choice of subjects and attempted to teach the duties incumbent on each member of a social state.³

It is evident that so far as this appeal was to the sensibility of the audience the drama was a suitable vehicle for it.

¹ ' Il doit surtout avoir une idée haute de la nature humaine, en reconnaître l'excellence et la respecter dans le fond de son âme. Il doit croire que l'homme est né bon. S'il pensait le contraire, de quel droit s'imaginerait-il pouvoir le toucher, le convaincre, le porter au bien ? S'il croyait ne parler qu'à des coeurs endurcis, il devrait briser sa plume et juger son art infructueux.'—*Du Théâtre*, p. 218.

² ' La vérité n'est vérité que quand elle devient *pont-neuf*, il faut la mettre en couplets de chanson pour qu'elle fructifie universellement, il faut qu'elle descende de nos livres pour être habillée en opéra-comique ou en vaudeville.' See Béclard, Sébastien Mercier, p. 152. *An 2440*, iii. 216.

³ ' ... On n'a point aperçu toute la fécondité, toute l'étendue de cet art important ... L'Ecrivain, moins audacieux qu'esclave, n'a guères vu que son cabinet, au lieu de la société. Même de nos jours, l'assemblée qui compose ordinairement les auditeurs de nos pièces, ne peut être considérée que comme une compagnie particulière à laquelle les poètes ont eu le dessein de plaire exclusivement. Nos pièces ressemblent assez à nos salles, car la physique gouverne en plus d'un genre (et que trop) le moral ... Cependant le moyen le plus actif et le plus prompt d'armer invinciblement les forces de la raison humaine et de jeter tout à coup sur un peuple une grande masse de lumières, seroit, à coup sûr, le théâtre ; o'est là que, semblable au son de cette trompette perçante qui doit un jour frapper les morts, une éloquence simple et lumineuse pourroit réveiller en un instant une nation assoupie ; c'est là que la pensée majestueuse d'un seul homme iroit enflammer toutes les âmes par une commotion électrique ; c'est là, enfin, que la législation rencontreroit moins d'obstacles et opéreroit les plus grandes choses sans effort et sans violence.'—*Du Théâtre. Epître*, pp. v, vi.

Sensibility belongs distinctly to the 'âme de la foule,' and is infectious. Here, on the stage, was an opportunity for the individual to appeal to the mass and to provoke in the crowd that emotion which was thrilling him as an individual and had to be dispersed among a sympathetic audience. This is another likeness to the appeal of the Romantic movement in the nineteenth century. Then again, as subjects of political and social concern (as well as more personal matters) provoked the sensibility of the individual, these two found their reflection on the stage. There is hardly an event in the eighteenth century—from society scandals to religious disputes and financial breakdowns—which is not alluded to in the drama. Thus realism reigns over dialogues, characters, events,¹ and disputes the stage with the didactic theory.

As the stage reflected a desire to set up a standard of civic life it also entered a protest against contemporary restrictions of liberty, the whole stated in terms of emotion, and set in a frame that was so like life that the audience really felt themselves to be taking part in what happened on the stage.² The subjects sought for the stage were serious ones, of a usual kind. 'La nation,' said Collé,³ 'est devenue triste.' People wished to find interest and likelihood on the stage but not satire. La Harpe works out clearly the reason for this attitude of mind :

'La disposition des esprits est autre que dans le siècle passé. Nous sommes au moment de la satiéte et nous voulons des émotions fortes. Nos mœurs sont plus cor-

¹ 'A la louange de la paix de 1763 Favart donne *L'anglois à Bordeaux*; pour la consolation des revers récents, du Belloy emprunte à nos annales le Siège de Calais; dans *L'Amour Français* Rochon de Chabannes livre aux applaudissements du parterre les jeunes exploits de Layfaette.'—Béclard, *Sébastien Mercier*, p. 155. See also Desnoiresterres, *La Comédie Satirique au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 1885), La Fontaine, *Le Théâtre de la Philosophie* (Paris: Cerf).

² A curious consequence of this was that the theatre in the eighteenth century was sometimes the only subject of conversation. In 1784 the author of *Paris en miniature*, p. 44, says: 'Des milliers de jeunes gens et de vieillards demeuraient absolument muets, s'ils n'avaient pour entretien les actrices et les pièces de théâtre.'

³ iii. p. 242.

rompues, et nous aimons qu'on nous parle de vertu ... C'est le genre le plus fécond qui nous reste.'¹

The theory held by both Mercier and Diderot, that the theatre exists for purposes of moral and political utility, was opposed by Rousseau, who, steeped in the classical literature of the seventeenth century, and aware that, according to the classical writers, the drama was intended to give pleasure, combated it on that ground, and argued that the theatre was merely an amusement, and a very useless and harmful one.² According to Rousseau, the purgation of the passions was the least likely result of the drama, which was apt to move them only too greatly.³ Rousseau's strongest argument is that the pity and emotion which find their way out in useless tears can never produce a moral good, especially as the cause is illusory and not real. They only lead to a passive self-satisfaction.⁴

Mercier however was so convinced that morality resided in the very art of the theatre that he was not disturbed by Rousseau's view.⁵ He thought that what man did as a group before a group of others who were listeners must bring out the social idea so strongly that individual selfish-

¹ *Mercure de France*, 1770, pp. 141–147.

² ‘Un spectacle est un amusement; ... tout amusement inutile est un mal pour un être dont la vie est si courte et le temps si précieux.’ Rousseau's letter produced in 1759 a reply from Marmontel among others. His views were not popular in Geneva itself.

³ ‘L'émotion, le trouble, et l'attendrissement qu'on se sent en soi-même et qui se prolongent après la pièce, annoncent-ils une disposition bien prochaine à surmonter et à régler nos passions ?’

‘Une émotion passagère et vainque qui ne dure pas plus que l'illusion qui l'a produite, un reste de sentiment naturel étouffé bientôt par les passions, une pitié stérile qui se repaît de quelques larmes ... En donnant des pleurs à ces fictions, nous avons satisfait à tous les droits de l'humanité, sans avoir plus rien à mettre du nôtre ... Quand un homme est allé admirer de belles actions dans des fables et pleurer des malheurs imaginaires, qu'a-t-on encore à exiger de lui ? N'est-il pas content de lui-même ? Ne s'applaudit-il pas de sa belle âme ? Ne s'est-il pas acquitté de tout ce qu'il doit à la vertu par l'hommage qu'il vient de lui rendre ?’—*Lettre à d'Alembert*.

⁵ Marmontel, in the *Apologie du Théâtre* (1761), considers the stage as ‘une école de politesse et de goûts,’ as against Rousseau: ‘celui qui, pour notre bien, eut voulu nous mener paître.’ He allows that sensibility is the base of violent passions, but argues that it is also the root of all good and virtuous impulses and that it is incorrect to assume that passions can be bridled by cold reason alone.

ness would be lost. Sensibility, thus exercised, would become social sympathy, the source of all the virtues.¹ Both Rousseau and Mercier believed in the ideal perfectibility of man, but Rousseau thought that man could only recover primitive goodness through renouncing society,

- ✓ Mercier, that his salvation was to come through society. Of the two ideals Mercier's has been the more prophetic of modern political conditions, and it is also evident that his has the more strongly influenced the history of the stage. For though Mercier's own drama has not persisted to the present day in France as an example of his method, it was played for several years, both in the provinces and later in Paris, and it became a part of the theatrical tradition. Also it was known together with Diderot's, La Chaussée's, and Destouches', in England, Italy, Germany, Holland, and helped to contribute to the formation in those countries of the atmosphere which was favourable to the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century. In France itself the influence became again apparent when in that century Dumas fils, Augier, and Sardou made an effort to use the stage as a means of establishing a moral idea ; and the same desire controls certain types of English drama of the present day.

Mercier then believed that ultimately the good of the individual and the good of society are one. Natural and social man make one being. Just as Mercier cannot bear the over-analysis of emotion nor the false distinctions that result from this, so he cannot bear to see the functions of man's individual and social life considered apart ; natural right in his view is also the right of man to the greatest possible happiness.² Mercier's idea of freedom is emphati-

¹ See Béclard, *Sébastien Mercier*, p. 74, and *Du Théâtre*, Mercier, p. 7. 'Laissez dormir les précieuses facultés de l'homme, elles s'anéantiront peut-être, il deviendra dur par inertie, par habitude ; éveillez-les, il sera tendre, sensible, compatissant.'

² 'Qu'il sache que tous les publicistes ont dit une sottise quand ils ont avancé que l'homme social était autre que l'homme de la nature ... que les lois de la société ne doivent pas contredire les lois de la nature, qu'elles en sont la perfection, ... que le droit naturel est le droit de l'homme à son plus grand bonheur possible ... qu'il sache que l'erreur n'est jamais utile ... qu'il sache

cally that of Corneille in the seventeenth century, it consists in the strength of soul. But when once character is firmly established taste can be varied and free.

In projecting his ideal for the stage and for the nation further than other men of his time, Mercier not only collected and completed their views, but was able to give a formula for the Romantic movement of the next century. Almost every point mentioned by Madame de Staël, and many that formed part of the theories of the later Romantics, can be traced in Mercier's writings. The belief in a national literature, the artist's necessity for self-expression, and for affecting his world—these words perhaps define the outstanding lines of his thought.¹ But he looks beyond early Romanticism to the beginning of socialism with its new effect upon literature; he sees literature not only as the expression of societies but as helping through national education to mould new forms of society. His idea of the moral function of the stage is connected with his wish for political progress. Even in the last years of his life he escaped from the weariness of a disappointed individualism that was characteristic of the Romantic period. He was

que la vérité dite une bonne fois laisse une impression profonde que toute vérité est donc bonne à dire aux hommes ... Enfin qu'il aime la gloire et qu'il ne ment point sur cet article. C'est le cri de l'estime public.'—*Du Théâtre*, p. 221 *et seq.*

¹ See, for illustration, *Tableau de Paris*, x. 38, where Mercier speaks of his 'esprit amoureux des beautés vastes et irrégulières.'

Mon bonnet de Nuit, iv. 196–254: 'Vous, hommes de lettres et dignes de ce nom, vous ne profanerez point une plume qui ne doit être consacrée qu'au bien public. ...' *L'homme sauvage*, p. 87: 'J'aperçus de même le rapport sensible des êtres créés, toutes les créatures correspondaient entre elles sous la main du Dieu unique, la nature était vivante sous l'œil d'un Dieu vivant; j'étais moi-même une portion animée d'un souffle divin, enveloppée dans une masse terrestre, et je disais dans ma pensée: "Tu ne périsras point; tu vivras toujours avec l'unité sublime, avec l'harmonie éternelle."' *Songes philosophiques* (1768), p. 8: 'L'âme de l'homme vertueux ne veut point être heureuse, on veut l'être avec l'univers.'

It is possible that the publication of Lessing's (1729–1781) *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* in 1765, and *Zur Geschichte und Literatur* in 1773 had some influence on Mercier's thought. He was at any rate acquainted with some of Lessing's plays, but makes no direct reference to Lessing's criticism. Lessing's first interest in the drama, it may however be noted, began about 1746 when he was at the University of Leipzig, and translated French plays for the town theatre.

upheld by a faith in human nature that for his immediate successors was eclipsed.

In some directions the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century did not follow the lines suggested by Mercier. It was not mainly a dramatic manifesto by the Moderns against the Ancients ; not only the claim of the present day as against the past to be represented in art. The national literature invoked in the nineteenth century claimed to be more than this. It desired to make the past live again as material for a representation of life both in the novel and on the stage. The sense of mystery and the sense of fatality, both bequests of mediaeval life and experience, were recovered by the Romantics. It is difficult to put too strongly Mercier's instinctive opposition to mediaevalism. He was unable to read with any patience a drama of fatality like *Phèdre* or *Romeo and Juliet*. His hardest words are for Racine's masterpiece, though this is not avowedly on account of the element of fatality in it, but because unguarded passion is its theme. Mercier, with his incurable optimism and his sentiment that human feeling must triumph over fate because in his view it ought so to do, believes that the hero of a drama must be a law to himself, responsible for his own actions, and quite able to direct their course, and that when he does so, Providence inevitably seconds him in every way. Now in Racine's *Phèdre*, the hereditary instinct which is her snare, and which prevents her from having complete command of herself, produces a justification of her acts as *drama*, while Racine (himself sharing in the moral tone of the period) would not have been able to place these on the stage but for the interpretation given to them as in part a result of hereditary evil. Tragedy is nearly always the problem of the attack on the conscious power of the individual over his own destiny. Mercier's dramatic theory is averse from the presentation of tragedy of this type, whether the fatality is drawn down by human error and lack of judgment, or whether, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, it is the result of a blood-feud, which is external to the immediate actors on the scene, involving them in the results of an enmity which is contrary to their own impulse and

has not been adopted by them. In his adaptation of Shakespeare's play, Mercier therefore brings his *Roméo et Juliette* to a happy conclusion, and he reduces the tragedy of Lear and his daughters to that of a *bourgeois* household where family disputes arise over the misdeeds of the servants. Mercier thus does not realise, though he is a moralist in comedy, that the morality of tragedy entirely depends on the acceptance of the elements of fatality and heredity, and of the sense of sin, both individual and social. For if no historical causes were invoked in the shipwreck of life the attack on the integrity of personality would be impossible for humanity to bear. Mercier, however, was naturally disposed to express himself in comedy rather than tragedy. Even here it will be seen that the effort to express a moral in his play strains the description of life that Mercier has at his disposal, and he often brings in unlikely romantic situations or makes a melodramatic appeal, in order to bring his play into dramatic form.

On the whole, the success of France, both in the great romantic tragedy of the seventeenth century, and in the satiric drama of Molière and his followers, was that of the true moralist, and the *genres* were those that did not obscure the moral. French art in the eighteenth century was faced with new problems, and the comparative failure to produce good work, which is noticeable in so many dramatists of this time, is due to their trying to find a definite prescription for the drama without realising that the moral aim must be attained by different means within each *genre*. For most writers this prescription included the union of a realistic method with the moral aim of tragedy, comedy, or *drame*; and speaking generally they failed as dramatists in proportion as they attempted to carry out their intentions, and succeeded when their unconscious artistic perception guided them away from the prescribed path. We are far from suggesting that the realistic method cannot produce a good acting play, but it does not necessarily produce, as the eighteenth-century dramatists required it to do, a play with an obvious moral. And a play must be a failure when an author who is a realist suddenly remembers at one point

that he must be moral (as Diderot did) and blurs his own unity of conception, or when a moralist thinks at intervals that he must do nothing but observe and picture life (as Mercier sometimes did). One can imagine that it would be possible to have a play in which the dialogue and painting of character are true to life, and the result at the same time moral in its teaching. But then the plot would be made to serve the moral purpose and be frankly imaginative, the general lines of the play being romantic ; they would express the unity of idea and artistic choice of one mind, and carry out one intention. This is the origin of the lively domestic drama of the twentieth century in England,¹ while the more sombre dramas² have a relentlessly realistic plot and presentation, without losing the power of producing a moral effect. On the other hand, a play may be moral in the sense that it is a criticism of society, and it may include photographic observation of reality. But just as the constructively moral play only secures its aim by slightly overdoing the description of ideal conditions, so the destructive play, or satiric drama with a moral aim, only produces its effects by exaggerating the real : a fact which all readers of Molière will have noticed. So Diderot's successful play, *Est-il bon, est-il méchant ?* concentrates and exaggerates the clumsy kindness and ingenuous falsity of Hardouin, which are really non-social qualities. Dancourt and Le Sage both lay on the colours thickly where they are describing actual conditions. The greatness of Marivaux and of Beaumarchais in the eighteenth century seems to be that Marivaux successfully accomplished the feat of describing with psychological analysis characters placed in an imaginative setting, Beaumarchais placed his more vigorous observation of life within a romantic setting. But Marivaux spoils his scenes when his characters begin to moralise, and Beaumarchais when he wishes the audience to be touched by what he has said. Both great authors when they were most successful were being led by their own artistic sense and were avoiding the snare of philosophic advice. Part of the theory

¹ *The Great Adventure, and Bunty Pulles the Strings.*

² Such as *Rutherford and Son*.

of the eighteenth century, namely, that a play should be useful to the country and that it should obtain its moral effect by touching the emotions, really concerns the judgment of the critic and of the audience more than that of the writers of plays. Where these points are made much of in the preface it frequently happens that the preface was an afterthought.

Mercier was, then, as we have seen, no critic of tragedy,¹ and no apologist for the past. He does not look backward to find romance, but forward to seek melodrama, which really owes much to Mercier's first introduction of 'strong' situations on the stage. But he was right in urging that present and national conditions could be a background for drama ; and it was in this way, as well as in his defence of the idea of a national theatre, that he looks beyond his immediate successors in the theory of dramatic art. To the ordinary mind it is easier to imagine an historical background for a drama than one of the present time, because it seems that time must elapse before a series of events can be seen sufficiently in perspective to afford interest of an artistic kind ; this generally means that the dramatist is guided in his choice of events by legendary views and by common opinion. Thus the legends of Charles V¹ and of Louis XI² have afforded subjects of this kind for drama. It is, however, the privilege of the artist, by the choice of a point of view and in relation to a critical moment, to produce an imaginary perspective of character and events ; thus a central fact detaches itself to his vision and the rest is seen in relation to it. Such art can be exercised on the conditions that are immediately present to us.

Mercier himself refers to the agreement with his theories on the part of Buffon, who in his *Discours à la réception de M. de Duras à l'Académie française 1775*, two years after Mercier's pamphlet *Du Théâtre* was composed, pleaded for a national drama which should be useful to the state :

' J'admire cet art illusoire qui m'a souvent arraché des larmes pour des victimes fabuleuses ou coupables : mais cet

¹ Victor Hugo, *Hernani*.

² Mercier, *Louis XI* ; Casimir Delavigne, *Louis XI*.

art ne serait-il plus vrai, plus utile, et bientôt plus grand, si nos hommes de génie l'appliquaient, comme M. de Belloy, aux grands personnages de notre nation ?'

'Enfin quel doit être le but des représentations théâtrales, quel peut en être l'objet utile ? si ce n'est d'échauffer le cœur et de frapper l'âme entière de la nation par les grands exemples et par les beaux modèles qui l'ont illustrée ?'¹

Mercier's plea found another echo in the year of the Revolution in a fiery pamphlet on *La Liberté du Théâtre en France* written by Marie-Joseph Chénier. It is difficult not to assume some conscious repetition of Mercier's thought by Chénier. The difference is that Chénier's pamphlet was written in the heat of revolution and stimulated by the thought that freedom was the first necessity to art as to politics : 'il n'y a pas de patrie sans liberté.' Like Mercier Chénier looks upon the theatre as a means of affording instruction to the people : 'Le Théâtre est comme la chaire, un moyen d'instruction publique'; its influence is rapid and hardly to be measured : 'La sensation que fait éprouver, à deux mille personnes rassemblées au Théâtre français, la représentation d'un excellent ouvrage dramatique, est rapide, ardente, unanime ...' 'L'homme est essentiellement sensible. Le poète dramatique, en peignant les passions, dirige celles du spectateur. Un sourire des pleurs ... suffisent pour nous faire sentir une vérité que l'auteur d'un traité de morale nous aura longuement démontré.'

A government should then control the theatre and encourage its work :

'Un gouvernement équitable encouragerait tout ce que peut corriger les mœurs publiques ... Tout dépend donc, pour une nation, de la masse de ses lumières.' 'Ainsi l'art de penser et d'écrire rendra chaque jour les hommes plus éclairés, et par conséquent plus vertueux, et par conséquent plus heureux.'

¹ M. de Duras, said Buffon, had suggested to de Belloy the subject of his tragedy, *Le Siège de Calais*.

A similar appeal was made for a national opera : in the *Bibliothèque historique de la Révolution* an anonymous writer points out the necessity to the nation of beautiful spectacles, and emphasises the fact that an opera always has to be subsidised by King or State. So in 1749 the town of Paris directed the opera under the King's immediate authority. In 1780 the King took over the opera entirely and gave it great financial support.

'Il faut de grands spectacles à une grande nation, à un peuple de héros. C'est là que le citoyen, soldat de la liberté, éprouve l'amour de la valeur, l'enthousiasme des belles actions.'

The history of the stage during the years immediately following 1789 is a comment on the exalted theories held by Mercier and Chénier. The direction of the censorship fell into the hands of different parties in turn, and the stage was used (it is true rather ineffectively) during those years for political propaganda rather than for spreading the light.¹

¹ In the critical years of the century it came to be worthy of remark if the audience listened quietly to the play throughout its course. In 1793, for instance, the play was judged according to its republican tendency (*Lettre de Perrière, Tableau de la Révolution Française*, vol. ii. pp. 109–17); in 1795 many theatres were closed on account of their bad moral tone (*Lettre de Houdeyer, ibid.* vol. ii. p. 498); in 1799 all plays of a royalist tendency were cut out, and aristocratic liveries were forbidden (*Milly et Le Tellier, ibid.* vol. iii. p. 411). In the same year only one play was found which fulfilled the real expectation of the representatives of the people, *L'Officier de Fortune*, and one opera, *Toute la Grèce, ou Ce que peut la liberté* (*ibid.* vol. iii. p. 464). In 1800 pieces which were classical or historical were again put upon the stage. Where the play did not exactly represent the temper of the nation the audience chose out portions for applause or condemnation. So in 1796 those who were seeing *Phèdre* applauded the lines 'Ne distinguerait-on jamais sur le front des mortels le crime ou l'innocence ?' (*ibid. (Rapport spécial)* vol. iii. p. 52). In 1795 *Pamela* was taken off because of the republican speech of one character, and the aristocrats were allowed to recover their places in *Le Conteuret* (*ibid. Lettre de Houdeyer*, vol. ii. p. 528).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Cramping influence on the drama of philosophic views—Effect of political theories—New aesthetic theories derived mainly from the practice of *drame*—Traditional tragedy and comedy: remoteness of the stage from the experience of the spectators—The desire in the eighteenth century to bring together stage and audience—Realism displaces symbolism in representation—Interest roused by (i) the appeal to feeling, (ii) spectacle, (iii) ‘pantomime,’ (iv) *tableaux*—Rise of light opera—Liberty of the stage, 1791: changes in production brought about by political bias: the new century.

IN reviewing the evidence for the connexion between dramatic theory and practice in the eighteenth century it has become clear that the theory, suggested as it was by the current philosophy of the period, tended to cramp the development of the stage by making the practice of dramatic art subordinate to the moral function which was supposed by eighteenth-century thinkers to be its special privilege. Not only were the plays loaded with moral axioms and exhortations, but the dramatic movement was hampered by the self-revelation of motive which was attributed to the principal characters, who all attempted to explain their conduct. Such an explanation was unusual in seventeenth-century comedy, where the disclosure of motive was brought about through action on the part of several characters, but in the weaker structure of eighteenth-century plays it appeared to become necessary. There was however a deeper error in the practice of the eighteenth-century dramatists, than was involved in their pointing of a moral. There was an absence of the masterly analysis of mind which Corneille and Racine and Molière shared with the rest of the generation taught by Descartes. Voltaire himself perceived that

some tragedies represented a desultory conversation rather than action or effect of mind on mind.¹ The language of tragedy or *drame* tended to become 'de la prose léthargique.' Marivaux was the last of the writers of comedy who depended upon psychology to illustrate the springs of action of his characters. His successors explain heavily and unconvincingly why an impossible situation has come about.

There were certain other influences upon the drama which may be described as political, rather than moral. Such an influence, though it dictated the conditions of the play, had a less unfortunate effect than a philosophical bias. It is to this political motive that we trace the portrayal of the professional, the commercial, the industrial and finally the oppressed classes in dramatic art. All forms of eighteenth-century drama illustrate this tendency. The historical tragedy of the latter part of the century, while attempting a picture of national life, puts the bourgeois elements in the foreground, while the kings and princes recede. This is the case with the plays of Marie-Joseph Chénier and Népomucène Lemercier. In comedy the valet and the soubrette are dismissed and the serving men and maids come to life and show their individual character. Even stock comedy characters like Arlequin become ordinary beings with individual life and feeling.²

The drama of the eighteenth century expresses a generous admiration for the virtues of the bourgeois class, and exhibits its republican principles by the manner in which it treats the subject of the uneducated, the oppressed and the criminal classes. The plays were intended to be interesting to a large and varied audience.

The aesthetic theories (as distinct from the philosophic and political theories) which dominated the character of the plays presented during the period, were deduced, like the aesthetic theories of the seventeenth century, from the

¹ *Discours sur la tragédie à Milord Bolingbroke*, 1731. 'Nous avons en France des tragédies estimées qui sont plutôt des conversations qu'elles ne sont la représentation d'un évènement.'

² Cf. the description of Florian's *Arlequin* as 'bon, doux, ingénue, simple sans être bête, parlant purement et exprimant avec naïveté les sentiments d'un cœur très tendre.'

actual practice of the stage.¹ Thus we find more dramatic theory of an aesthetic kind in the prefaces to plays such as those of La Motte, Le Sage, Beaumarchais and Voltaire, than in the pamphlets by Mercier, Chénier, Rousseau, Marmontel, which appeared in the latter part of the century independently of the authors' dramatic work, and which were all intensely coloured by their political views.²

It was recognised in the eighteenth century that tragedy and comedy were generally written according to the rules, and the new elements in aesthetic were supplied by the *drame* and by the plays which were affected by that new type of dramatic work.

In the *Petite Bibliothèque des Théâtres* (Le Prince et Baudrais) published in 1784–1789, a series of *essais historiques* connect the forms of the tragedy, tragico-comedy and comedy with their origins in the Greek, Roman and mediaeval art of the theatre. From these essays it appears that the tragedies of Voltaire were regarded in the eighteenth century as plays which took their place in a long development of classical tragedy, while contemporary comedy was linked to the mediaeval farce, and also to Latin comedy, from which it drew its form and to a certain extent its traditions. The innovation of the *drame* was not critically considered by the authors of the collection in question: this *genre* appeared to them to have come naturally into being as a result of the inclusion of the element of sentiment in the

¹ The student of the eighteenth century will, however, realise that public opinion was influenced in the direction of aesthetic theory by writers who were not primarily dramatic critics. The strongest influence of this kind was perhaps that of the Abbé Dubos (1670–1742), whose *Réflexions sur la Poésie et la Peinture* deny to art any intellectual quality, and find the basis of aesthetic enjoyment in pure sentiment. Both in the *drame* and the novel of the eighteenth century we find forms which correspond to these ideas, and which have been directly derived from them.

² Chénier, in his prefaces to his plays, produced something more of a poetic. See in the *Discours préliminaire de Charles IX*: ‘La tragédie doit peindre les passions humaines, dans leur plus grande énergie. La différence des époques et des contrées exige quelques légères différences dans les formes; mais le fond doit être le même. L'esprit change: le cœur humain ne saurait changer. Cependant, s'il faut peindre la nature, où la trouver autour de nous? Elle est si fardée, si voilée, si chargée de vêtements étrangers, qu'elle n'est plus reconnaissable. Jetons au loin ces prétendus ornemens qui la couvrent et la déguisent, nous retrouverons la pureté des formes antiques.’

comedy, and of the attention to the claims of the *bourgeoisie* to be represented in the art of the stage. But as a fact the appearance of *drame* coincides with a new type of dramatic theory in France.

Traditional tragedy and comedy demanded a stage-setting which emphasised the remoteness of both types of drama from ordinary life. Tragedy, with its appeal to pity and terror, was expressed in rhymed and measured verse, which served to remove its phrases from the language of the day. The scene was laid in the historic past, or in some distant place. The actors were kings and queens or heroes and heroines of romance. The events described, including stories of treachery, adultery, incest, and an account of the punishments of these crimes by the Gods, would only be tolerated by an eighteenth-century audience if the histories of the persons represented were quite separated from the experience of every-day life.¹

Comedy, too, depended for its effect on the contrast between real life and the events on the stage. A play was amusing because it was an exaggeration of life, because, in fact, it was overdrawn. Elaborate stage trappings and dresses accentuated this impression. An artificial manner and exaggeration of speech were characteristic of the actors both of comedy and of tragedy.

About the year 1739 Voltaire noticed that people were going less to Molière's comedies. In 1746 Molière's plays were taken off for a time, and after 1766 they were hardly ever acted. The same fate befell classical tragedy, though in a modified way. Corneille's *Les Horaces* and Racine's *Andromaque* and *Phèdre* were not for any length of time absent from the répertoire until the Revolution and the Terror and the Napoleonic wars destroyed the general taste for tragedy. But the classical tradition in tragedy was fiercely attacked at the same period as that of comedy, La Motte and Fontenelle both opposing the 'aristocratic' and superhuman type of character represented, together

¹ Even in the 17th century the scandal about Racine's *Phèdre* was chiefly due to the vividness of the presentation of such facts at a time when a corrupt society had recalled them to mind.

with the plots of the great plays, and the narrative and monologues. An influence had come in, as early as 1739, which threatened the position of classical art in France.

Coincidently with the philosophic desire to teach a moral on the stage, and with the political desire to see all conditions of people represented on it, came the wish to unite actors and audience by a common bond of sympathy, and destroy the remoteness of the classic stage. To a large extent this latter change was due to foreign, and especially to English influence. The plays of Shakespeare, as they became known in France,¹ showed a large canvas, on which all conditions of life were represented, and in some of which every playgoer could interest himself. The playgoers, too, were no longer only the educated class, but included every other class. Earlier than the influence of Shakespeare was the influence of contemporary English drama on France. The plays of Lillo² and Moore³ accustomed the reader to the portrayal of contemporary life, in which a great deal of crude realism was displayed, and the audience were satisfied to judge the play on the ground of its exact resemblance to ordinary experience. The success of these plays entirely depended on such a recognition. In the English plays there is frequently a prologue and sometimes an epilogue addressed to the audience. The players, when they uttered their lines, often turned to the house rather than to the other actors with whom they were playing. This helped to create a current of sympathy and to unite the stage and the house. The German domestic drama (Lessing's *Miss Sara Sampson* was written three years before Diderot's *Le Fils Naturel*) had a similar though more limited effect. The appeal of such plays was the stronger since no shadow of satire or ridicule interfered with the serious treatment of bourgeois life, and thus the play remained on the level of common experience.

Since the remoteness of the stage was being given up, all symbolism of representation was bound to disappear.

¹ From 1756 onwards. See, however, the *Théâtre Anglois*, 1749.

² Especially *The London Merchant*, 1731; first translated 1748.

³ Especially *The Gamester*, 1753, adapted by Saurin, 1760.

Dress and scenery became realistic and intonation natural. This last was a difficulty to the classically trained actor, and it was not until about 1780 that we find the necessary simplicity of diction had been obtained. There was, however, a danger that the new form of dramatic work would be flat in effect, and so it proved. The slightest exaggeration led to melodrama. Thus, although more classes and conditions were represented on the stage, there was very little sense of contrast and no perspective. Even the best plays of the type, Sedaine's *Philosophe sans le savoir*, and Diderot's *Est-il bon, est-il méchant?* though they have characterisation, are each set in a very monotonous *milieu*. Mercier and Voltaire both take trouble to weaken the colouring of the English pieces they adapt. Artistic relief is, therefore, obtained in other ways, either by the strongest possible appeal to the emotions of pity and kindness—no play of the type of *drame* was considered a success unless the audience had been moved to tears—or by an appeal to the sensations of the eye and the ear. The history of the *drame larmoyant* illustrates the first point : that of *tragédie-opéra* the second.

The actual structure of the *drame larmoyant* has been already discussed (Chapter III); the theory of the *genre*, as deduced from the prefaces of the plays, appears to be that the appeal to the audience should include that of pity and exclude that of terror. With this difference almost any of the old plots could be utilised, as indeed they were. But the problem, as presented by Nivelle de la Chaussée, is artificial, and therefore it is not an insoluble one.¹ As presented by Diderot the play draws to a conclusion which is hardly a solution, but a different stage in the history of the characters.² As presented by Mercier an impossible romantic ending caps the play at a moment when the problem becomes exasperating to common sense.³ In every case the appeal is to feeling and not to logic or probability.

An attempt to attract the popular interest by spectacles

¹ *Mélanide, La Gouvernante, L'Homme de Fortune.*

² *Le Père de Famille, Le Fils Naturel.*

³ As in the case of *La Brouette du Vinaigrier*.

of varied kinds on the stage is characteristic of *tragédie-opéra*, and a play framed on an ancient plot and not adapted to contemporary life almost always found its way out into *tragédie-opéra*. Voltaire argued that this *genre* represented more closely the simple structure of the Greek play, with the popular elements of spectacle and choric movement, than did the classical French tragedy.¹ Voltaire's own plays of the later period were assimilated to *tragédie-opéra*, and he learned to depend on spectacular effect to keep the interest of his audience. But the tendency is not confined to tragedy, and one of the most interesting contributions of eighteenth-century dramatic art results from the movement.

At the beginning of the period 1690–1808 Molière's attempts to produce a more vivacious stage-method instead of the ordinary fixed recitation had already had an effect. The larger stage, and greater freedom of movement of the characters, the beginnings of natural scenery in the place of the fixed stage-interior, had made the whole process of acting more elastic. But at the beginning of the eighteenth century the reform was mainly felt in the opera, where elaborate and realistic settings were prepared. Diction in tragedy still leaned to the type of a recitation.

Mercier in his *Nouvel Essai*² says 'la tragédie devint après Corneille une sorte de farce sérieuse, écrite avec pompe, qui visait à satisfaire l'oreille, mais qui ne disait rien à la nation et ne pouvait rien lui dire.'

In this criticism he points out the change which is taking place in the attitude of the people to a tragedy. The play must mean something to the audience; and its appeal must be not only to the ear, as was the case with the educated audiences of the seventeenth century, but to the eye. Hence all conventions on the stage gradually gave way to a representation which was as nearly as possible that of actual life.³ The scanty stage-directions in certain plays of

¹ Diderot, in *De la Poésie dramatique*, holds the same view.

² Pp. 30 and 85.

³ There are many examples given of the effect of this illusion. At a performance of *L'artiste Infortuné* in 1788, when the financier is refused by Angélique and her parents, someone called out from the 'Seconde loge,' 'C'est bien fait.'—*Pet. Bibl. des théâtres*, tom. v.

Corneille¹ and Racine² develop into the detailed directions we find in Diderot and Mercier. In fact Diderot, some years before he produced his first play, had framed his conception of it : ‘La perfection d’un spectacle consiste dans l’imitation si exacte d’une action que le spectateur, trompé sans interruption, s’imagine assister à l’action même.’³

The spectacular effect is then connected with the wish to draw the interest of the audience over the footlights and on to the boards. The idea is not confined to the use of appropriate scenery : ‘pantomime,’ or expressive though silent movement and gesture, comes in to reinforce the effect on the eye. ‘Pantomime’ is in fact the spectacular expression of action and emotion. Thus the ‘entre-actes pantomimes’ invented by Beaumarchais in *Eugénie* are intended to provide that the spectator shall be, as Diderot had suggested, ‘trompé sans interruption,’ for on this continued illusion depended the success of his *drame*. Long waits between scenes are fatal to realistic treatment.⁴

In cases where the actual plot-interest was slight, and the play much more definitely a spectacle than a drama, recourse was had to the grouping of the characters to form suggestive ‘tableaux,’ and also to the introduction of music into the play itself. Plays of this type were of the ‘vaudeville’ character : and the most characteristic examples were the adaptations of Goldoni’s Italian comedies, the adaptations of English plays,⁵ and the plays verging on light opera which were produced during the period of Revolution.⁶

A new *genre*, which was more decidedly operatic, though with elements of *drame* and comedy, was produced by Sedaine and others with the co-operation of musicians such as Duni, Philidor and Grétry. This was a most graceful and charming *genre*, and originated in light opera composed (usually on the theme of *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*) for the entertainment of the court in the pre-Revolution period.⁷ An example of this *genre* is Rousseau’s

¹ *Clitandre.*

² *Esther, Athalie.*

³ *Les Bijoux Indiscrets.*

⁴ The French stage has always avoided the incongruous music between the acts which punctuates an English play.

⁵ Such as Poinsinet’s *Tom Jones*.

⁶ Such as Marmontel’s *Sylvain*.

⁷ See A. Jullien, *La Cour et l’opéra sous Louis XVI.*

Le Devin du Village. Between 1771 and 1780, when *drame* proper suffered an eclipse, there were many experiments of this kind. Another was also due to Rousseau, that is, his presentation of the story of *Pygmalion* in a kind of monologue supported by an orchestra with a background of appropriate scenery. Grimm¹ notes the effect:—‘*Pygmalion* prend avec fureur, et la singularité du spectacle est un puissant aiguillon pour le public.’

In 1780 the Comédie Italienne was allowed not only to produce French plays such as those of Marivaux, leave for which had been taken away for some years, but also to produce the light operas mentioned above. During the actual period of revolution light opera degenerated into melodrama, especially after 1791, when the proclamation of the liberty of the stage did away with all copyright five years after the death of an author, and allowed anyone who wished to exercise it, the freedom to produce a play. That freedom was, however, greatly curtailed by the censor, and after 1791, though there was the appearance of liberty, the political necessities of the government controlled all dramatic production. Thus the *bourgeois* element gave way during the Napoleonic period to military hero-worship, and was succeeded at the Restoration by plays with a monarchical tendency.

¹ *Corr. Litt.* xi. p. 139.

APPENDIX

- (a) PLAYS ACTED BEFORE THE FRENCH COURT IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE MONARCHY.
- (b) POPULAR REPUBLICAN PLAYS.
- (c) *La Journée des Dupes*, PIÈCE TRAGI-POLITI-COMIQUE.
- (d) CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE.

- (a) PLAYS ACTED BEFORE THE FRENCH COURT IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE MONARCHY.

THE quick reflection of political life in France on the stage which is noticeable all through her dramatic history, has a great interest to the student of the revolution of 1789. The history of eighteenth-century stage production shows that public opinion, as exhibited in the attitude of the *parterre*, expressed the forces of democracy and not as in the seventeenth century the feeling of a literary clique. If the play produced did not suit the opinion of the moment, words were twisted out of their natural sense and made to bear other politically suitable interpretations, while if the tone was radically unsympathetic to the populace, the play was damned and the actors hissed off the stage.¹ Tragedy, comedy, and the opera went on all through the years of Revolution, and the opera was only closed for a rare moment at the height of the Terror, when the spangled dancers were turned back and the doors shut at the news of the death of

¹ 'C'est ainsi que le public se venge en certaines occasions : il n'écoute plus les vers que pour saisir ceux dont il peut détourner le sens et le rendre applicable à ses anathèmes.'—Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, ix. pp. 348-349.

Marat.¹ Up to 1789, while the Court was at Versailles, plays were acted before the King and Queen both there and at Paris, while the visit to Fontainebleau in December of each year was an occasion for testing new plays before their public production in the capital. Until Marie Antoinette became Queen these new plays were heard in a courteous but dead silence ; but she decided to allow applause, and thus a success at Fontainebleau became a real test of the way a play would be received at Paris. The police censorship was exercised over revolutionary lines such as those which occurred in Voltaire's *Brutus*,² and also reflected the King's desire not to have any scene verging on impropriety put upon the stage. It appears that this was his real objection to *Le Mariage de Figaro*, while the Queen was interested in the political character of the play, and herself encouraged and allowed free criticism of any drama.

Of the four types of dramatic work in vogue in the eighteenth century—tragedy, comedy, *drame* and the opera—it was tragedy which expressed the serious desire of the nation for reform together with its monarchical ideal ; comedy which reflected the changing condition of society ; *drame* which gave effect both to philosophical theories and to the emotions and ideals of the middle class. As *drame* ✓ became general, with Diderot and Mercier, both tragedy and comedy began to share in its characteristics ; tragedy swerved from the classical form and became historical and romantic, comedy included an appeal to feeling, while the approach of the Revolution produced plays with a political tendency treated satirically by Beaumarchais and by his enemy Bergasse. In 1789 D'Harleville's *Monsieur de Crac*,

¹ July 13, 1793.

² Voltaire's tragedy, *OEdipe*, written as early as 1718, was already revolutionary in tone. It attacked kings and priests, the sense of fatality and the immortal Gods ; and the long series of plays which followed *OEdipe* had their political allusions, and not only signalled the democratic movement, but helped to hasten it. *Brutus* (1730) and *La Mort de César* (1743) were two of the most important plays in this series from the point of view of political prophecy.

Brutus, Act IV. sc. 8 :

' Et que la terre avoue, au bruit de ses exploits,
Que le sort de mon sang est de vaincre les rois.'

a small piece full of fast and joyous fun, was the only real success of the year : in the height of the Terror the pastoral play *Abel* by Legouvé soothed the minds of a Parisian audience : but these plays were intended to distract and had no political tendency. The political satires, though not as a rule good in their plot and construction, are those which will mainly interest the student of the Revolution.

Comedy itself was developing on the political side. The aristocratic comedy in which the servants played the farcical parts had begun to go out of fashion in the eighteenth century. Either serious drama was performed, in which the scenes were laid in middle-class life and the nobility and court were ignored, or the comedy produced represented the servants as gradually getting the upper hand over their masters. The valet, instead of being the traditional butt of the piece, gradually acquired a name, individual character and a share in the plot. Instead of being called L'Olive, or L'Epine, or some similar generic name, he is Merlin, or Pasquin, or Crispin, or Frontin, the character varying in each case. Though capable of devotion to his master he is a person of boundless impertinence who serves his own interest. By the time that Beaumarchais began to write, the times were ripe for the appearance of Figaro, the *valet-maître*, who is the central character in all his plays, and can be literally said to represent the *tiers-état* just rising into prominence at the time of the calling of the *États Généraux*.

All Beaumarchais' plays combine the idea of the exaltation of the middle and lower classes with depreciation of the traditional methods of society, especially as shown in the persons of the King and courtiers. Historians of the period hardly ever make any allusion to the coming democratic forces as expressed in the drama, though they quote the famous description of the growth of scandal from *Le Mariage de Figaro* ; but Beaumarchais himself knew that his plays would have an effect on politics.

The history of the opera is closely connected with that of the Court. Between the years 1780 and 1790 there seems to have been a story of obscure intrigue which involved

them both. The Queen had under her special protection the Italian composer Sacchini, and this musician together with Salieri and Piccinni were the unhappy objects of the hatred and rivalry of the party of Gluck. In 1781 Sacchini was presented to the Queen at Trianon, and heard Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, on which the Queen and the Emperor Joseph, then staying with her, asked his opinion. From that time onwards every effort was made to frustrate Sacchini's career, and the 'Surintendant des Menus Plaisirs,' the two brothers La Ferté, and the committee of the Opera, made a combination to defeat his work and embarrass the Queen. They even went so far as to quote the Queen in a letter desiring Sacchini's work to take precedence of others in the 'répertoire.' The malicious intention was evident, but Marie Antoinette had no idea of giving up her own preferences, and at the same time would not suffer her dignity to be attacked. She therefore brought La Ferté to book and made him apologize for mistaking and misquoting her. The persistence with which she tracked down the conspiracy and seized little external indications of what was wrong showed how alive she was to her difficult position. The Queen had acquired the right of uttering the last word in matters concerning music and the stage,¹ and was insistent that it should be attended to and might not be misquoted.² She demanded that Sacchini's opera *Renaud* should be rehearsed at the time agreed upon, though all the factions of the Opéra were against it; and she commanded a special representation of his *Dardanus* at Trianon in 1784, and insisted on its being given afterwards at Paris. There came a time, however, in 1786, when even the Queen could not hold out against the force of public opinion. Berton, a pupil of Sacchini, narrates the fact :

¹ The finances of the Opera were subsidised by the King.

² Her methods were sometimes expeditious and frank in the extreme. When La Ferté asked to be allowed to justify himself to her, Campan, her Secretary, wrote that the Queen would never consent to read such a mass of scrawled manuscript : 'la reine ne consentira jamais à lire tant de griffonnages'; while when La Ferté went on to deny what he had written, Campan replied that he could not ask the Queen to believe she had not read what she really had.

‘ La reine Marie Antoinette, qui aimait et cultivait les arts, avait promis à Sacchini qu’*Œdipe* serait le premier ouvrage qu’on représenterait sur le théâtre de la cour, au voyage de Fontainebleau. Sacchini nous avait fait part de cette bonne nouvelle et continuait à se trouver, selon son usage, sur le passage de Sa Majesté, qui, en sortant de l’office divin, l’invitait à passer dans son salon de Musique. Là elle prenait plaisir à entendre quelques-uns des beaux morceaux *d’Arvire et Evelina*. Ayant remarqué que, plusieurs dimanches de suite, la reine semblait éviter ses regards, Sacchini, tourmenté, inquiet, se plaça un jour si ostensiblement devant Sa Majesté qu’elle ne put se dispenser de lui adresser la parole. Elle le reçut dans le salon de Musique et lui dit d’une voix émue : “ Mon cher Sacchini, on dit que j’accorde trop de faveur aux étrangers. On m’a si vivement sollicitée de faire représenter, au lieu de votre *Œdipe*, la *Phèdre* de M. Lemoine, que je n’ai pu m’y refuser. Vous voyez ma position, pardonnez-moi ! ” ’

Sacchini went away to Paris and could not contain his grief. Three months later he was dead, and his opera of *Arvire et Evelina* was left unfinished. The Queen in 1788 ordered Piccinni to finish it, but the actors at the Opera were indignant that the honour should be bestowed on another Italian, and Piccinni dared not contest the point, for had not the actors burnt Rousseau in effigy not so long ago merely for daring to criticise modern French music ? Therefore the conductor of the band wrote the final scenes, and apparently no one at Court asked if they were Piccinni’s or not.

From the year 1783 onwards groups of plays were performed before the King, Queen, and Court which had a very definite political bearing. In addition to the plays of Beaumarchais the following list will supply allusions of some interest.

In 1783 a parody of Shakespeare’s *Lear* by Pariseau was played : and it was intended to show that even a King was helpless before the forces of the world and of nature :

‘ Je n’ai pas un ami : cependant j’étais roi,’ says Lear, and he is mocked in the following lines :—

‘ Philosophons à l’air sur ce terrible orage.—On est roi,—c’est égal,—tu vois,—il pleut sur vous.’

In the same year, 1783, Le Fèvre's play *Elisabeth de France* was censored by the police, but acted privately. Grimm (*Corr. litt.* ii. 368-9) says :

'Un des endroits de la tragédie qui a été le plus applaudi, et qui l'a même été avec une affectation fort indiscreté, mais encore plus déplacée, c'est la leçon qui Philippe donne à la reine de s'occuper à plaire, et de lui laisser le soin de régner ...'

In 1786 the play of *Numa Pompilius* by Florian was acted before the Court. It was clearly intended to refer to the episode of the diamond necklace and to suggest that the Cardinal had every excuse for his mistake when he met Oliva in the Bosquet. Grimm's review of the play is as follows :

'Ce qu'il y a de plus singulier dans ce roman poétique, c'est la reconnaissance d'Anaïs sous le voile mystérieux de la nymphe Égerie : mais je ne sais si cette idée paraîtra fort heureuse, à moins qu'on n'y cherche quelque motif secret, comme celui de justifier l'étrange méprise de M. le Cardinal de Rohan. Aurait-il voulu nous prouver que puisqu'un prince aussi sage, aussi éclairé que Numa Pompilius a bien su prendre la petite Anaïs, avec laquelle il avait vécu plusieurs mois, qu'il était sur le point d'épouser, pour une nymphe, pour une divinité destinée à faire le bonheur des Romains, M. le Cardinal peut bien avoir pris, la nuit, dans les bosquets de Versailles, une demoiselle Oliva pour une personne auguste ?'

It was probably slightly in defence of the situation that the Queen, when asked to give her opinion of the play, pronounced it insipid :

'En lisant *Numa*', disait l'autre jour la reine au baron de Besenval, 'il m'a semblé que je mangeais de la soupe au lait.'

In June 1785 the Queen went to see the play *Mustapha*, in which the chief incident was a great rush of the crowd to invade a mosque and assert their power. Afterwards she expressed her extreme interest :

'La manière dont on avait traité ce sujet m'avait tant intéressée, je l'avoue, que je ne croyais pas qu'il fût possible de m'intéresser encore davantage.'

In 1786 a 'comédie-épisodique' by Sedaine, *Le Marchand d'esprit et le Marchand de Mémoire*, was represented at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique. The treatment is frankly satirical, and is reminiscent of Voltaire's attacks on Leibniz. Momus, who has been driven from earth, returns as a merchant and meets 'L'homme à projets' who has plans for reforming the world. He explains himself thus :

'Sans doute, j'ai fait ce que j'ai dû faire—L'homme ordinaire voit le bien et le mal, et laisse les choses comme elles sont. L'homme de génie tâche de reprimer l'un et d'ajouter à l'autre, en cherchant à découvrir le mieux. J'y travaille, depuis cinquante-trois ans. Sciences, Morale, Politique, j'ai tout étudié, tout calculé. J'ai approfondi toutes les causes, j'ai multiplié les effets, en diminuant les moyens ; enfin, Messieurs, j'ai prouvé que tout est mal, que tout pourrait être bien, qu'il falloit seulement tout renverser, et que la chose étoit faisable.'

Momus notes that in the condition of society at the time such a person may fail, or make a temporary success of an impossible plan. In the following scene a woman comes in, in conversation with an abbé, and Momus ironically addresses her, blaming the women of fashionable life for the evils and inequality of the time :

'En un mot, si la coquetterie est la cause d'une foule de désordres ... c'est la faute de Plutus, qui ne prodigue pas les richesses à ceux qui savent en faire un si bel usage, et jamais la faute des femmes, qui doivent donner tous leurs instans aux plaisirs sans prendre la peine d'ouvrir les yeux sur ce qu'il pourra coûter à qui il appartiendra.'

Sedaine's irony is next turned on the stage itself, on the carelessness of actors, and the absence of wit in the writers, since they fear the effects of attacking social evils and follies. His own play is itself a refutation of his theme : and it is evident that the anxiety of the times would lead to plainer speech in the theatres.

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In 1787 Beaumarchais' opera *Tarare*, with music by Salieri, was played before the Court. Even more strongly than the *Barbier de Séville* and the *Mariage de Figaro* the new opera attacked the existing order of things and the institution of monarchy.

The Queen had promised to be present at the first representation of *Tarare*, but she gave way to remonstrances, and seeing that she might do harm by seeming to authorise Beaumarchais' words by her presence, she remained at Versailles.

There were other incidents in 1787. One was the performance of Doigny du Ponceau's *Antigone*. Here four lines were suppressed by the police because of the danger to public feeling :

'CRÉON.

Les grands l'ont approuvé, pourrait-il vous déplaire ?
Vous avez vu le peuple obéir et se taire.

HÉMON.

La voix du courtisan soutient d'injustes lois !
Quand le peuple se tait, il condamne ses rois.'

In the same year *Le Roi Théodore*, an opera by Paisiello, was given at Versailles. Théodore in the play was expressing distress, when a person in the *parterre* cried out 'Que n'assemblez-vous les notables ?' The Queen, who was present, forbade any notice to be taken of the offender or any punishment inflicted.

In 1788 Chabanon put upon the stage the comedy of *Le Faux noble*, but in spite of its challenging title the play failed because the States-General were about to assemble, and the people, recognising that the King had kept his promise, would not look on patiently while the nobility and royalty were treated with derision. As Grimm says, '(ils) ont paru voir avec indignation l'excès de l'avilissement dans lequel on osait lui présenter un grand seigneur.' The idol of monarchy may have been broken, but the people were not ready to see the emblems of the ancient system treated with anything but respect.

The year of the Revolution, 1789, was marked by several

more direct attempts to warn the King and Queen of their danger. D'Harleville, who owed his early success to the Queen and to the good offices of Madame Campan, and who, in an early play, *L'Optimiste*, had treated with gentle irony the opinions of the Encyclopaedists, wrote in the summer of that year a play called *Les Châteaux en Espagne* in which he satirised the false security of the Court, and parodied the hopeful feeling of the nation and the belief in a political Utopia.¹

A severe warning is uttered in the play : 'If I were King,' says the actor,

'Je choisirais d'abord un ministre honnête homme,
Le choix est bientôt fait quand le public le nomme.'

A play by Puységur, written in the 8th year of the Republic, gave an account of the prisons during that dangerous time ; of the element of tragic chance in the so-called trials, and of the alternate cruelty and venality of the judges. Nothing more terrible could well have been uttered as a warning, but it was not only the maker of political plays who spoke clearly to the facts of the destroyed monarchy, and the Terror to come. The message of the tragedies played in these fateful years was even more clear than that of the comedies.

The first important play of Marie-Joseph Chénier (1764–1811) *Charles IX ou l'Ecole des Rois* (1788) was produced some months only after the taking of the Bastille, and as Chénier was a politician as well as a man of letters it was inevitable that the play should bear some mark of his views.

In the dedication to the King which precedes the play, Chénier asks the King to accept his frank statement of the responsibilities of kingship :

'Permet qu'une voix libre, à l'équité soumise,
Au nom de tes sujets te parle avec franchise :—
Prête à la vérité ton auguste soutien,
Et, las des courtisans, écoute un citoyen.'

¹ See pp. 31, 32.

The *Épître Dédicatoire* contains a warm appeal to the King to be present at the play :

'Ah ! venez au Théâtre de la Nation quand on présente *Charles IX* ; vous entendrez les acclamations des Français : vous verrez couler leurs larmes de tendresse : vous jouirez de l'enthousiasme que vos vertus leur inspirent ; et l'auteur patriote recueillera le plus beau fruit de son travail.'

The indications in the play itself were meant to be clear. The continual insistence on the family name of Bourbon, and the topical allusions, put the moral beyond a doubt.¹ The following extracts will prove the point :

'Vous ne prétendez pas imiter, je l'espère,
Ces rois qui, sur le trône, élèves du vulgaire
Font régner tout l'amas des superstitions,
Enfants qui du sommeil gardent les passions,
Et qui, sur les projets qu'on songe leur inspire
Risquent, à leur réveil, le destin d'un empire.'²

And the duel between Charles and Catherine :

'CHARLES. Immoler tout un peuple !'
CATHERINE. Il s'agit de régner.'³

Or this :

'CHARLES.
Cependant je ne puis concevoir aisément
Comment le Roi des rois, le Dieu juste et clément,
Devenant tout à coup sanguinaire et perfide,
Peut ainsi commander la fraude et l'homicide,
Comment il peut vouloir qu'à l'ombre de la paix
Un roi verse à longs flots le sang de ses sujets.'⁴

Or this, the last apostrophe of Henri to Charles :

'Et, quand la mort viendra frapper votre jeunesse,
Vous chercherez partout des yeux consolateurs ;
Et vous verrez, non plus vos indignes flatteurs,

¹ As a result, the paper called *Les Révoltes de Paris* in 1792 freely alluded to the Queen as 'Médicis-Antoinette,' and the Court was accused of wishing to repeat the massacre of St. Bartholemew's Day.

² Act I. sc. 2.

³ Act II. sc. 1.

⁴ Act II. sc. 2.

Mais de vos attentats l'épouvantable image,
 Mais votre lit de mort entouré de carnage,
 Et votre nom royal à l'opprobre livré,
 Et l'éternel supplice aux méchants préparé.
 Vous répandrez alors des larmes impuissantes ;
 Vous gémirez : du fond des tombes menaçantes
 Un cri s'élèvera vers le ciel offensé ;
 Et vous rendrez le sang que vous avez versé.'¹

Coligni, in the play, opposes to the evil counsels of Catherine the ideal of kingship :

' Sachons, il en est temps, tout oser, tout connaître,
 Et qu'à la voix d'un roi vraiment digne de l'être,
 Le commerce et les arts, trop longtemps négligés,
 Par mes concitoyens ne soient plus outragés.

.

L'Océan réglera le destin de la terre ;
 Le paisible commerce enfantera la guerre ;
 Mais, ramenant les rois à leurs vrais intérêts,
 Le besoin du commerce enfantera la paix ;
 Et cent peuples rivaux de gloire et d'industrie,
 Unis et rapprochés n'auront qu'une patrie.
 Le plaisir, instruisant par la voix les beaux-arts,
 Embellira la vie au sein de nos remparts.
 Ah ! de cet heureux jour qui ne luit pas encore,
 Du Tibre à la Tamise on entrevoit l'aurore.
 L'art de multiplier, d'éterniser l'esprit,
 D'offrir à tous les yeux tout ce qui fut écrit,
 Renouvelle le monde, et dans l'Europe entière,
 Déjà de tous côtés disperse la lumière ;
 L'audace enfin succède à la timidité,
 Le désir de connaître à la crédulité.
 Ce qui fut décidé maintenant s'examine
 Et vers nous pas à pas la raison s'achemine.
 La voix des préjugés se fait moins écouter,
 L'esprit humain s'éclaire ; il commence à douter.
 C'est aux siècles futurs de consommer l'ouvrage.
 Quelque jour nos Français, si grands par le courage,
 Exempts du fanatisme et des dissensions,
 Pourront servir en tout d'exemple aux nations.'²

¹ Act V. sc. 3.

² Act II. sc. 3.

And again :

' Evitez les malheurs des rois trop complaisants,
 Ne laissez point sans cesse au gré des courtisans
 Errer de main en main l'autorité suprême ;
 Ne croyez que votre âme, et régnez par vous-même ;
 Et si de vos sujets vous désirez l'amour,
 Soyez roi de la France, et non de votre cour.
 Que sous de justes lois le peuple enfin respire ;
 Il fait par ses travaux l'éclat de votre empire,
 Il cultive nos champs, il défend nos remparts :
 Mais un voile ennemi vous cache à ses regards :
 Mais, tandis qu'il se plaint, son monarque sommeille,
 Et ses cris rarement vont jusqu'à votre oreille.'¹

Together with the attack on absolute monarchy we have an attack on Rome, for Chénier saw very clearly the part that the Church had played in oppressing the people, and inflaming party spirit and producing wars of religion :

' Faut-il nous étonner si les peuples lassés,
 Sous l'inf�xible joug tant de fois terrassés,
 Par les décrets de Rome assassinés sans cesse,
 Dès qu'on osa contre elle appuyer leur faiblesse,
 Bientôt dans la réforme ardens à se jeter,
 D'un pontife oppresseur ont voulu s'écartier.'²

The *OEdipe Roi* by M.-J. Chénier is an interesting contrast to Voltaire's treatment of the same subject. Chénier used this play as he did that of *Charles IX* to recall the King of France to his duty as patriot-king. The threats used by the high priest to OEdipe are changed in view of this context :

' Soyez encore OEdipe, et sauvez vos sujets ;
 Pour nous avec les dieux que la terre conspire ;
 Ou bientôt, roi ou non, vous n'aurez plus d'empire.'³

The people are then recalled by the King to their allegiance :

' Ecoutez, retenez, rappelez-vous sans cesse
 Les ordres, les sermens, les vœux de votre roi.'⁴

¹ Act II. sc. 3.

² Act I. sc. 1.

³ Act III. sc. 2.

⁴ Act I. sc. 2.

The appeal is to equity beyond the private interest of King or people.

In the dialogue between Œdipe and Crémon (the latter is represented as self-sacrificing and self-controlled), Œdipe says :

‘Vous désobéissez aux volontés d'un roi ?’

and Crémon answers :

‘Oui, son pouvoir n'est rien, séparé de la loi.’¹

Finally Œdipe calls on the Thebans, and Crémon acquiesces :

‘C'est moi qui les appelle,
Nos libertés, nos jours, ne sont pas votre bien,
Vous êtes roi de Thèbes, et j'en suis citoyen.’²

Chénier's other tragedies, *Fénelon*, *Cyrus*, *Caius Gracchus*, followed *Charles IX*, and a line in the latest tragedy, ‘des lois et non du sang,’ was greatly applauded by the people, who saw in it Chénier's political creed.

If in the early part of the eighteenth century the ideal of the stage was the enlightenment of the people, at the end of the century it was desired to teach a dying monarchy what were the opportunities it had lost ; and it is difficult to avoid great surprise at the blindness of Louis XVI and his Queen to a message so clearly conceived and so frankly uttered.

In February 1790 Ronsin's *Louis XII* was played, and was found to be full of allusions to contemporary events :

‘Notre capitaine à la suite de la garde nationale a voulu plier l'histoire de son héros à tous les évènemens du jour ; à la prise de la Bastille, à l'insurrection de la bourgeoisie, au rôle intéressant que joue M. le Marquis de Lafayette, figuré dans la pièce par le brave Chevalier Bayard.’³

In the same year *Le Présomptueux ou l'Heureux Imaginaire*, by Fabre d'Eglantine, renewed the irony of *Les Châteaux en Espagne*, and Voltaire's *Brutus* was recalled to the stage. The words of Brutus,

‘Je mourrai comme toi,
Vengeur du nom Romain, libre encore et sans Roi,’

¹ Act III. sc. 2.

² Act II. sc. 2.

³ Grimm, *Corr. Litt.*

provoked a storm of hisses and applause. Finally a man shouted 'Quoi ! l'on ne veut donc plus de monarchie en France ? Qu'est-ce que veut dire "Vive le Roi!"?' The feeling was contagious and in a moment everyone had sprung up and was shouting 'Vive le Roi!' It was the last outbreak of public loyalty to the monarchy in France.

(b) POPULAR REPUBLICAN PLAYS

Among the plays which were produced immediately before the year 1789, none had so great a vogue as Chénier's *Charles IX*. It was played again and again, and acted as an outlet for the Revolutionary spirit, which found its justification in the sentiments of the play. Chénier's *Tibère* partly covers the same ground, but was not printed till after the death of the author. During the years of Revolution the plays which had a political significance were not very numerous.¹ Any assembly of people was liable to be riotous, and the only performances that escaped molestation were comparatively colourless plays at the Comédie or the Opéra. Such were D'Harleville's *Monsieur de Crac*, Legouvé's *Abel*, and the many musical plays or operettas of the period. One writer of operettas, however, Monvel, produced in 1791 a *drame* called *Les Victimes Cloîtrées*, which expresses the anti-clerical side of the Revolution spirit, a spirit that had already been shown when the Constituent Assembly in 1780 refused to recognise Catholicism, and suppressed monastic orders. Monvel's *drame* was then certain of success. A very large proportion of the

¹ Certain plays which symbolically represented the Revolution should, however, be mentioned : *L'Année 1789*, by N. de Bonneville, and *La France régénérée*, by J. B. Chaussard. These plays are in the form of a pageant, or Revolutionary fête on the stage, and have no dramatic value. All the characters represent abstract ideas. The lowest stage in this type of pageant was reached in 1794 when *Les peuples et les rois ou la tribunal de la Raison* was performed. Here the Virtues appeared on the stage flanked by busts of Rousseau, Marat, Le Pelletier and Brutus. (Welschinger, *Le Théâtre de la Révolution*, p. 206.) With the exception of two anonymous plays in defence of Marie Antoinette and Madame Elisabeth, the plays of the period attacked the monarchy, the nobility and the clergy, and they owed all their popularity to their sympathy with the hatred of the people for their ancient institutions.

clergy had refused to take the oath imposed upon them, and it was to the lasting regret of the King, Louis XVI, that the dissentients were not supported by what little influence remained to the monarchy.

The story told of the attack made on Père Laurent in the play by a person in the audience, who professed to see a likeness to his former superior in the convent, (though the incident was probably itself staged for a purpose,) proves that in the *drame* before us the law which prevailed in the conditions of eighteenth-century drama applied strongly to Monvel's play. The relation between the stage and the house was so close that in moments of excitement the audience joined in the action on the boards, and itself became, as it were, a chorus to the play. *Les Victimes Cloîtrées*, though a 'pièce à thèse,' is interesting because it places on the stage an external conflict, between the secular and cloistered life, and an internal conflict in the minds of the two principal characters, Dorval and Eugénie. Père Laurent is their evil genius. He is opposed by Francheville, by the old servant Picard, and by Père Louis, while Madame de St. Alban, Francheville's sister and the mother of Eugénie, is a tool in his hands. The play ends with the release of the two lovers, and the popular approval bestowed on Père Louis, who has been the means of freeing them, and who breaks the chains which bound him to the cloister.

From 1791 onwards the history of the stage was affected by the decree of January 13th of that year, which gave leave to any individual to set up and direct a theatre under the control of the municipality. The result was to destroy the literary standard of the drama, which had been kept up by the Opera and the Comédie française, and to open the way for a number of popular experiments that were political in character.

During the two years 1791–3 the history of the Revolution was rapid and intense. It was not reflected on the stage, for the actors of the Comédie française only produced light pieces, such as D'Harleville's *Monsieur de Crac*, or repeated Molière's plays, with the object of amusing the audience or lulling it into security. Picard's two plays,

Les Suspects and *Andros*, failed because they had a political view and satirised the extremists. One play, however, Laya's¹ *L'Ami des Lois*, was a manifesto of the Girondist party, and appealed at the same time so strongly to the popular taste that it was suppressed by the Commune. This was not done without rioting. The trial of Louis XVI was going on at the time, and the Commune was determined to avoid anything which might develop a strong and moderate public opinion. The people, however, supported by the Conseil Municipal, insisted on the representation of the play, and it was not until armed force intervened that the performances were stopped and the actors thrown into prison.

The author himself acknowledges that his play is a satire, and he reverts to the old form of comedy in verse. His object is expressed in a speech by Forlis, one of the characters²:

‘ Mais si vous entendez par ce mot³ l'homme sage,
Citoyen par le cœur plus que par le langage,
Qui contre l'intrigant défend la vérité,
En dut-il perdre en peu de popularité,
Sert, sachant l'estimer, et parfois lui déplaire
Le peuple pour le peuple, et non pour le salaire,
Patriote, et non pas de ceux-là dont la voix
Va crier *Liberté* jusqu'au plus haut des toits,
Mais de ceux qui sans bruit, sans parti, sans systèmes,
Prêchent toujours la loi qu'ils respectent eux-mêmes,
Si fuir les factions, c'est être modéré,
De cette injure alors j'ai droit d'être honoré ! ’⁴

He shows the motive of self-interest in the extreme party which has nothing to lose, and discloses the atmosphere of suspicion and treachery which reigns everywhere when the men in power use force for their own purposes and not for the sake of their country. The portrait of Robespierre in the character of Nomophage was close in its characterisation. The people in 1793 had suffered sufficiently to recognise

¹ Author of *Calas* and other plays.

² *Moderés*.

³ Act III. sc. 3.

⁴ Act V. sc. 6.

where the evil lay, and they rejoiced in the sentiments that conclude *L'Ami des lois*:

‘Vous nous montrez si bien,
Que le seul honnête homme est le vrai citoyen.’¹

The vein of irony and the defence of the moderate party connect this play with a satire which was not written to be acted, though it was in the form of a drama. *La Journée des Dupes* has an interest that is mainly historical, and it had little or no opportunity of influencing public opinion. It was printed anonymously, the author being probably Bergasse. The problem of the authorship and the historical allusions are considered later.²

The use of satire is the strongest characteristic of the work of the writers who in the period 1793–1800 succeeded in gaining the ear of the people.³ Two days after the execution of Marie Antoinette, a ‘prophétie en prose,’ *Le Jugement Dernier des Rois*, by Maréchal, was put on the stage. Its motto was ‘Tandem ! ... ’⁴

The author explains in the preface that he is heaping ridicule on kings in revenge for the ridicule expended in earlier days on the ‘peuple souverain.’ As in *La Journée des Dupes* savages appear on the stage. Kings are treated as ‘brigands couronnés.’ A volcanic island is chosen for their place of exile, where they find an old man who has suffered all the injuries possible under the *ancien régime*. ‘Un sans-culotte’ speaks to the old man:

‘... Tu vas les voir tous ici, un pourtant excepté.

LE VIEILLARD.

Et pourquoi cette exception ? Ils n'ont jamais guère mieux valu les uns que les autres.

LE SANS-CULOTTE.

Tu as raison ... excepté un, parce que nous l'avons guillotiné.’

¹ Act V. sc. 6.

² Pp. 205–231.

³ It should be noted that by the decree of August 2, 1793, ‘patriotic’ plays were definitely encouraged by the Convention, and, in practice, classical comedy and tragedy were banned.

⁴ See Louis Moland, *Théâtre de la Révolution*, Introduction, p. 23.

Such savage irony proved impossible on the stage, and the last sentence was omitted in performance.

The sovereigns of Europe, all caricatured to excess, quarrel with one another in this play, and are finally exterminated by a volcanic eruption.

As the years passed, satire moved to the opposite camp. Ducancel in 1795 wrote, in response to an over-mastering impulse, the three acts of *L'intérieur des comités Révolutionnaires*. Here classic names, Aristide, Caton, Scevola, Brutus, Torquatus, are used to give an impression of the characters of the members of the committee; while the persecuted people have simple modern names. This is a curious mixture of symbolic and realistic treatment.¹

The desire of the people for a reversion to law and order is expressed in the last act of this play² by 'l'officier municipal':

‘Gendarmes, saisissez ces misérables, et conduisez-les, affublés de leurs bonnets-rouges, à la maison d’arrêt, où nous allons tous les rejoindre. Qu’ils traversent à pied, et au milieu des justes imprécations du peuple, une commune qu’ils ont baignée de sang et couverte de brigandage, jusqu’à ce que le glaive de la loi en ait purgé la terre.’

Justice and humanity, he concludes, have resumed their reign on the earth.

In 1796 Lemercier's *Tartufe Révolutionnaire* attacked the policy connected with the Terror in an unmistakable way, and in the same year Maillot (*le citoyen Ève*) put on the stage of 'Le Théâtre d'Emulation' the satirical picture of the 'poissarde-parvenue,' *Madame Angot*; and this was

¹ As a rule, during the inflated period 1793–7, the names of characters in the plays are purely symbolic, and suggest an unreal world. Thus we have a return to the names in vogue in the seventeenth century, e.g. *La Fleur* for a valet, and to those used in the sentimental drama of the eighteenth century, e.g. Dorval, Zelmire, Denonville, etc. The character of Arlequin, brought from Italy in the sixteenth century and used with much effect in the eighteenth century by Marivaux, reappeared in political farces from 1792 onwards. The entry of this character into a play is an assurance that politics will be treated with the lightest touch. Thus in *Arlequin Perruquier* the death of Robespierre is celebrated as opening the way to the revival of fashionable hairdressing.

* So. 8.

followed by several other comedies on the same theme before the author had exhausted their popularity.¹ Madame Angot belongs to the class of *nouveaux riches*, who desire to ally themselves with persons of rank. Her disappointment comes about when the prospective son-in-law turns out not to be the chevalier he has professed to be. The fact that this play could have the immense success it obtained is a proof that France was able to look with some detachment on the social absurdities of the day, and it marks a return to a social equilibrium. In the following year, 1797, the *Indicateur Dramatique* notes the revival. The stage is the most influential of the artistic institutions of the day. There are twenty-six theatres open in Paris, the pieces played there are recovering the ancient qualities of comedy, gaiety and satire :

‘Aujourd’hui l’horizon s’épure ; les plaies que nous a faites le vandalisme commencent à se cicatriser et les arts vont reprendre leur influence sur la prospérité d’un empire. Les étrangers admireront, nous envieront encore nos spectacles. Si dans tous les tems, ils ont fait la gloire des peuples justement célèbres, leur éclat, leur magnificence ne doit rien laisser à désirer chez une nation qui, par ses succès et sa modération, a mérité le nom de grande.’

The final blow to the stage of the Revolution was given when, on November 9, 1799, General Bonaparte established consular government in France. A new group of plays was immediately produced to flatter the Dictator. The titles all refer to St. Cloud,² where Bonaparte was to take up his abode, and where he produced a reflection of the glory of the kings of France.

(c) ‘LA JOURNÉE DES DUPES : PIÈCE TRAGI-POLITI-COMIQUE.’

The play here referred to was printed anonymously in 1789, three months after the events of October 5 and 6,

¹ *Le Mariage de Nanon* (1797); *Le Repentir de Madame Angot* (1800); *Aude, Madame Angot au Séraï de Constantinople* (1800); *Madame Angot au Malabar*, and others. Favart, *Joseph ou la fin tragique de Madame Angot* (1797).

² *Les Mariniers de St. Cloud*, *La Girouette de St. Cloud*, *La Journde de St. Cloud*.

1789, which form the central subject of its satire. It was attributed to Nicolas Bergasse, a prominent figure at the time, whose political views corresponded with those of the author of *La Journée des Dupes*. The authorship, so far as we know, was never acknowledged, and the argument for attributing it to Bergasse rests only on tradition and on the internal evidence afforded by the play.¹

Some time before 1861 a copy of the play attributed to Bergasse was bound up together with three 'pièces d'actualité' by the Marquis de Puységur, a friend of Nicolas Bergasse. The British Museum copy² is in this form. It contains a MS. note which attributes *La Journée des Dupes* to Bergasse: but it is catalogued as by 'Bergasse et Puységur,' evidently because the three other plays in the volume were written by Puységur.³ An examination of the four plays will convince the reader that the authorship of *La Journée des Dupes* is distinct from that of *L'Intérieur d'un Ménage Républicain*, *Paul et Philippe*, and *Le Juge Bienfaisant*, which bear the name of 'le citoyen Chastenet' (the family name of the Puységur house). Puységur's plays are not in any way distinguishable from many other slight 'pièces d'actualité' that were printed during the Terror. Their scope is limited, and they are conventional in treatment. Like other plays of the same description the form is that of the *vaudeville*; the characters break freely into verse in which republican sentiments are set to old melodies. The subject treated is generally an episode in the life of a bourgeois republican family. In one play, *Paul et Philippe*, the death of Robespierre delivers the family, in another *Le Juge Bienfaisant*, founded on fact, an upright judge causes the escape of innocent prisoners. But *La*

¹ In 1821 a play under the same title was written by Népomucène Lemercier. This play refers, not to the events of 1789, but to the original *Journée des Dupes*, during the Fronde. It has, however, been frequently confused with the earlier play.

² It is catalogued 11738 bbb 39 (4). Other copies are to be found in the Bibliothèque Nationale and in the Municipal Library at Versailles.

³ Grimm, *Corr. Lett.*, vol. xvi. pp. 552-3, reports the common impression of the authorship: 'Cette facétie a été faite, dit-on ... par messieurs de Puységur et Bergasse; on croit y reconnaître en effet le même ton de plaisanterie que dans la comédie de *La Cour Plénière*, attribuée également à M. Bergasse.'

Journée des Dupes differs in every way from the other three plays mentioned. It is primarily satire, not drama. The title-page declares that it is a play acted by 'les grands comédiens de la Patrie,' on the 'Théâtre de la Nation.' It recapitulates the events of 1789. In some cases the *personnages* are symbolic : 'La Maîtresse du Club' stands for the French nation as a whole ; the Revolutionary party is a 'Troupe de Brigands' ; 'Monsieur Garde-Rue' expresses the class of *sergents* ; 'La Peyrouse' is the aristocrat, and 'O Paria' the Indian who judges the political condition of France from the point of view of the noble savage. In other cases the characters are the political personages of the time, the names transparently travestied. Thus Mirabeau becomes 'Bimeaura,' Le Chapelier 'Pécheillar,' Bailly 'Laibil, on ne sait pas bien ce que c'est encore,' and La Fayette 'Yetafet.' Necker is referred to as 'Reken.'¹ Mounier, president of the National Assembly, appears under his own name as a 'citoyen vertueux,' and represents the political views of the author. As Mounier, Lally-Tollendal and Bergasse formed a close political group, this fact points among others to Bergasse's authorship of the play. The group is referred to in *La Journée des Dupes*² :

'Mais tu n'envies pas autant les rôles de Mounier, Lalli, et Bergasse.'

Bergasse's distrust of and opposition to Mirabeau is faithfully reflected in the play ; and the fact that Bergasse was at Versailles during the days of October 5 and 6, 1789, and was an eye-witness of the events of those days, would account for the peculiar vividness of their presentation in the play. He expresses a certainty about some otherwise doubtful historical points, for example, about the intention of the people to kill the Queen on the morning of October 6, and about the conspiracy which led up to it ; and he shows a close acquaintance with the motives of action of Lafayette.

¹ *Catépane*, according to Grimm, *loc. cit.*, is Castellane ; *Montmichi*, Montmorency ; *Mola*, Malo de L. . . . ; *Almenandre*, his brother Alexandre.

² Act III. sc. 8, p. 70.

A short account of the play is now appended.

Mirabeau discloses himself in the first Act, and describes Lafayette :

'Non, sans doute, ce foible esprit est pour toujours abandonné à la honte et aux remords. Mais comme les évènements semblent se jouer de la prudence des humains, l'homme qui, sans génie, sans projet, s'est jetté dans le tourbillon, uniquement pour avoir l'air de jouer un rôle, est celui que les circonstances veulent en vain élever au-dessus de moi. Yetafet veut anéantir la monarchie, pour former une association fédérative. Il compte obtenir le commandement des milices des provinces confédérées, c'est là la récompense que lui promet le parti dont il sert les projets, mais il le flatte d'un fol espoir. En vain il cherche à couvrir son ambition du voile de la popularité; en vain il affecte de prendre avec son mission les ordres de Laibl; la fausse modestie est un cadre qui fait ressortir l'orgueil; c'est inutilement encore qu'il l'entoure de livrées somptueuses, qu'il charge son écu de l'écusson des anciennes abeilles des Rois francs, il faut autre chose qu'un mannequin doré pour faire un maire du palais.'

The method is to make use of the vanity of Lafayette:

'Je me sers de la vanité de Yetafet, qui veut avoir le monarque sous sa garde ... Le roi prendra la fuite, et son épouse ...'

Mirabeau then meets the people and addresses them :

'Songez que nous avons des ennemis communs, on vous les fera toujours connaître sous le nom d'aristocrate; il n'en faut épargner aucun.'

The people respond, and 'un homme de la troupe' shouts out:

'Je vais mettre quatre charges dans mon fusil, et le premier aristocrate que je rencontrerai payera pour le véto.'

Meanwhile the *poissardes* have been made to understand that their interest is opposed to all government and all vested interests. With coarse simplicity they resolve upon action and the understanding between them and the military is complete.

In the next scene La Peyrouse, the aristocratic officer, comes upon the stage, and holds official language to the people :

‘ Tes yeux vont être éblouis de l'éclat du trône. Tu vas voir le plus grand monarque de l'univers tempérant sa puissance et sa force par sa modération et ses vertus pacifiques, près de lui une reine brillante de gloire et de beauté, adoucissant par une affabilité touchante cet air de majesté qu'elle tient de la nature et de son grand caractère.’

This is brutally interrupted by ‘ un homme du peuple ’ :

‘ Quel langage ! c'est bien là un aristocrate. Courrons vite chercher du monde pour l'arrêter.’

La Peyrouse meantime continues his exordium, and applies it to the French nation, its learning, palaces and arts, and even to the people :

‘ Tu vas surtout admirer l'urbanité et la douceur de ce peuple aimable, son idolâtrie pour son roi ...’

The crowd rush in shrieking ‘ A bas la cocarde blanche ! ... à la lanterne ! ’ The aristocrat appeals to a guard, Monsieur Garde-rue, who temporises as follows :

‘ Monsieur, les droits de l'homme sont en vigueur, et je n'ai que la voie de la représentation, jusqu'à ce que la loi martiale soit publiée. Mais ces messieurs sont des citoyens qui aiment autant la justice que la liberté ... vous savez bien, Monsieur, que depuis que nous sommes libres, on ne voyage pas sans permission de sa paroisse ...’

La Peyrouse cannot produce this passport : the *garde* calls to the soldier to ‘ envelopper ’ his prisoner ; while Monsieur Garde-rue concludes :

‘ ... Vous voilà justement entre les droits de l'homme et la loi martiale ... nous avons obtenu les droits de l'homme ; dès ce moment tout ce que vous appelez, dans votre langage aristocratique, brigands, canaille, règne, et fait tout ce que lui plaît ; quand cela devient trop fort, on publie la loi martiale ; c'est une finesse des aristocrates, parce qu'alors on tue tout le monde, ce qui établit l'équilibre, et fait une compensation ...’

Lafayette soliloquises in the second act :

‘ Mon rôle est secondaire, il manque quelque chose à ma gloire ... s'il faut un roi de France, je veux en être maître ; s'il doit perdre l'empire, je veux pouvoir m'en faire un mérite.’

La Peyrouse comes in again, hounded by the multitude ; he appeals to Laibil, who, full of his new office and dignity, questions him in the most banal way. The crowd at first protests ... ‘ j'allons le mettre à la lanterne, et vous ferez vot’ métier après ... ’ and the people excitedly imagine that La Peyrouse is bringing ships up the Seine to attack Paris, and that he is perhaps the Comte d'Artois ; but they finally acquiesce in Bailly's plan, which is to leave La Peyrouse at liberty in order that he may further compromise himself ; so he is set free, that is, he walks off guarded by two fusiliers.

The people then turn savagely to new game :

‘ ... je voulons aller couper la tête à ces chiens de garde-du-corps, qui font des gueuletons pendant que je mourrons de faim ... et puis ils ont dit au roi et à la reine qu'ils l'aimons bien ; je n'aimons pas ces façons-là.’

In the excitement they ask Lafayette to lead them to Versailles, and he is pleased to seem to yield to force.

La Peyrouse enters a hostelry, kept by La Maîtresse for the nation. She cannot give him plain food, only game from the estates of the aristocrats—and for that he has to wait till the men have done their military service and can go out hunting. He is unable to obtain a piece of bread, and La Maîtresse is sure that the aristocrats have stopped the mills from working and the rivers from flowing.

Then follows the attempted murder of La Peyrouse by the men who break in, and La Maîtresse swoons for fear.

The account of the march to Versailles is given by hearsay, but in language that only an eyewitness could have used. The attack failed in its first purpose, owing to the King's kindness, and the courage of the Queen, who was three times summoned to the balcony to be faced with charged guns, and each time disconcerted her murderers, who had already failed to find her in her rooms the night before. The

scene changes to Paris, where La Peyrouse, who has been cut down from the gibbet, goes off into exile. If there are any men who are not the dupes of politics, he asks, will they be able to see in the ensuing century who has been able to benefit by revolution, by abstract freedom and by the Rights of Man ?

The form of this work has a considerable likeness to that of three other political pamphlets which preceded it, and were suggested by contemporary events. These were '*La cour plénière, heroi-tragi-comédie*,' which was fathered on the Abbé de Vermond, and published 'chez la veuve Liberté, à l'enseigne de la révolution,' a sequel, '*Le Lever de Baville*,' written under the name of Lefranc de Pompignan, archevêque de Vienne, and '*Le Grand Baillage, comédie historique ... chez Liberté, à la Justice triomphante*.' Although the evidence points to Gorsas¹ as one author of these three satires, the others being Duveyrier and Fielval, and though they are inferior to *La Journée des Dupes*, it is likely that the author of the latter satire was acquainted with the earlier ones. There is a similarity not only in the idea of the satire, but in the references to a conspiracy against the national life, and an attack against the leaders and men in office. The plays contain, too, certain allusions which might point to some collaboration with Bergasse, as for example the appearance of Beaumarchais in *Le Lever de Baville*. The characters revile one another, and revile the theories of the Encyclopaedists, in the manner of the later play. But Bergasse used his material to point a very different moral.

Bergasse's political pamphlets are still in existence, and a comparison of these with the play before us, together with some account of the circumstances of his life, may help to solve the question of the authorship of *La Journée des Dupes*, which would seem to have historical importance as a criticism of persons and parties of the time, though it cannot claim to have much interest of a purely literary kind.

Nicolas Bergasse (1750–1832) was an independent thinker

¹ Editor of the *Courrier de Versailles*, which gave the signal for the events of the 5th and 6th of October : afterwards a Girondin.

and politician during the period of revolution in France. His profession was that of an *avocat*, but by inclination he was a writer on subjects connected with the theory of the state. As a young man he was attracted by Mesmer's principles, so far as he could apply them to the subject of politics. The idea of a vital fluid in organisms suggested to him a corresponding theory of a continuous life in the state ; which he conceived would be destroyed by revolution and by the overthrow of traditional methods in government. Thus his interest in political science threw him at once on the side of monarchical principles and against violent reforms. From the outset he was opposed to theorists of the school of Rousseau, who considered that progress was hindered by hereditary ties and prejudices. A *préjugé*, thought Bergasse, was a natural inheritance of moral influence : and the new generation should profit by the experience of the old until they were themselves able to give their own independent contribution to thought. Only by a close connexion between the present and the past could men gain 'une certaine sévérité de principes, une certaine tendance vers tout ce qui est juste et généreux.' Liberty, in Bergasse's mind, then stood for the power of conformity to a moral law which was exhibited in progress ; it was not the mere freedom from restraint which in the popular mind it appeared to be. Though not a believer in the necessity of revolution, Bergasse wished for reform within existing political conditions. He conceived that the will of the people should be expressed through a majority of the better instructed among them.

With these views he became a deputy of the Tiers-État, standing for the Sénéchaussée of Lyon in 1789 : and soon after his admission was chosen to be one of the sixteen members who were to confer with the other two orders. His political programme now became definite. He was in favour of one Chamber and against separate deliberation. The events of the next few months culminated in the formation of the National Assembly, and the committee of this Assembly made use of Bergasse to help them to formulate and work out the details of a new constitution for the nation. But the same cleavage that appeared in the country between

the constitutional politicians and the revolutionary leaders appeared too within this committee. The revolutionary party wished the Declaration of the Rights of Man to appear as a preface to the new constitution. Bergasse opposed this, partly on the ground that the Declaration was vague and unpractical, partly on the ground that it did not contain in its political theory anything about adherence to a Divine law of liberty. Both parties accepted the formula, 'La loi est l'expression de la volonté générale,' but Bergasse thought there should be a 'corps législatif' which should have considerable permanence in the State. Together with Mounier, Malouet, Lally-Tollendal and others he wished also to keep the principle of a royal sanction to laws. Malouet saw that in practice legislation was a rational application of the general will, and not its pure expression. 'La loi est l'opposé de la volonté simple. Partout où il n'y a que volonté il y a despotisme, partout où il existe un accord de la raison et de la volonté, il y a loi.' But after the votes of September 10 and 11, 1789, Bergasse, with Lally-Tollendal and Mounier, retired from the Committee.

Bergasse was one of those members of the National Assembly who were at Versailles during the days of October 5 and 6, and being aware of the intrigues for forcing the King and the Assembly to Paris, he courageously went to the help of the royal family at the critical moment. It was in Bergasse's rooms, in the 'Écuries de Monsieur,' that about thirty deputies of the Right and Right Centre collected on the morning of October 7 to talk over the depressing and dangerous situation caused by the events of the two preceding days, and to decide whether they should send in their resignations. Mounier, who as President of the Assembly had had the chief burden of the last two days, and whose firmness had put him in daily danger of assassination, decided to leave Paris at once : but Bergasse remained. One of his letters written at the time gives his impression of the political conditions :

'J'ai été, pour ainsi dire, témoin de l'assassinat de la famille royale ; j'ajoute que j'en ai tous les détails et que personne ne les a que moi ; j'ai vu l'assemblée Nationale

toujours conduite par les mêmes hommes, ne pas dire un mot de cet assassinat, le faire envisager dans les provinces comme une bonne action, s'applaudir de tenir le Roi prisonnier à Paris, car il l'est. Il n'ose pas sortir des Tuilleries, de peur qu'on n'égorge la Reine, qui n'a été manquée à Versailles que d'une seconde. J'ai vu la lâcheté des ministres ... Tout le monde est fou à Paris, manquant de pain chaque jour, allant aux spectacles tous les soirs et dansant sur un volcan allumé. Ce délire a quelque chose de surnaturel. Ce qu'il y a de sûr, c'est que du temps de la Ligue, tout le monde était ligueur ou anti-ligueur, excepté le chancelier de l'Hôpital. On l'appelait mauvais citoyen, et il le souffrait. Je fais comme lui. Sûrement s'il eut vu les journées du 5 et du 6, il aurait donné sa démission comme après la Saint-Barthélemy, car c'était aussi une saint-Barthélemy qu'on méditait, et je suis persuadé qu'on n'y a pas encore renoncé. On verra si j'ai tort. Quand la conjuration sera découverte (car il faut qu'elle le soit afin que la paix revienne), on rendra alors justice à Mounier, à Lally-Tollendal, et à moi. Jusque-là nous devons nous laisser calomnier, et souffrir que des hommes qui ne croient à rien, l'emportent sur nous.'

Bergasse—if we assume him to be the author of *La Journée des Dupes*—did all he could to expose the ‘conjuration.’ Here we have a list of ‘conjurés du grand collège,’ and ‘conjurés du petit collège,’ and Mirabeau’s methods are shown up, notably in the analysis he makes in the play of the characters of Necker and of Lafayette, and in his determination to use or destroy anyone who possessed influence with the people. Of Necker, Mirabeau says¹:

‘Il a balancé dans sa marche, je l’ai pris sur le tems, et l’attaquant avec courage, j’ai affoibli cette grande popularité ; j’ai dévoilé la foiblesse, intimidé son génie, mais Reken n’est point anéanti ; il convient encore à mes projets qu’il se traîne sans gloire sur le chemin de la liberté, dans lequel son ambition a imprudemment engagé ses premiers pas.’

The account of the ‘conjuration’ is continued throughout the play; the most striking passages being those in

¹ Act I. sc. 1, p. 8.

which Mirabeau consults with his creatures,¹ when this is taken in connexion with Mirabeau's statement of his own plan²:

' Je veux être maître, Pécheillar, et n'ai encore rien fait pour le devenir. Les deux premiers ordres de l'état anéantis, l'armée débauchée, les tribunaux supprimés, l'honneur françois souillé par mille atrocités, la discorde à la voix de mes agens, secouant par-tout les flambeaux ; tout est inutile sans le coup qu'il faut frapper aujourd'hui. La présence du monarque m'offusque, le grand caractère de la reine m'effraye, il faut que tous ces phantômes importans disparaissent.'

In a second letter written in October 1789 Bergasse described the present condition of despair and uncertainty in society :

' On ne rit point ici, tout est triste et monotone. La liberté règne toujours comme de votre tems. D'un moment à l'autre, vous pouvez être accroché à la fatale lanterne, et le premier faquin à qui votre mise déplaît, est maître de votre vie.'

Compare with this letter the satirical passages in *La Journée des Dupes* on the subject of liberty. Thus, when the aristocrat appeals to the *sergent* for protection we have the words of M. Garde-Rue³ already quoted :

' Monsieur, les droits de l'homme sont en vigueur, et je n'ai que la voie de la représentation, jusqu'à ce que la loi martiale soit publiée.'

And again⁴ :

' Vous savez bien, Monsieur, que depuis que nous sommes libres, on ne voyage pas sans permission de sa paroisse.'

And again⁵ :

' Monsieur, je ne sais qu'y faire. Je vois que vous ne connaissez pas encore bien la liberté. Vous êtes venu dans un mauvais moment, et vous voilà justement entre les droits de l'homme et la loi martiale.'

¹ Act III. sc. 7, pp. 61 ff.

² Act I. sc. 1, p. 11.

³ Act I. sc. 3, p. 24.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 25.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 27.

On October 12, 1789, the 'Séance' of the Assembly opened in Paris. About one hundred and twenty of the monarchical party had resigned. Bergasse had offered his resignation to the electors at Lyon, but had been asked to remain their representative. He merely lived, however, for a time at Versailles and avoided the sittings of the Assembly. On February 4, 1790, the Assembly demanded from its members both an oath of fidelity and an oath to maintain the constitution. This latter request was rejected by Bergasse, on the ground that the constitution in its present form was incompatible with true liberty. He was therefore excluded from the deliberations of the Assembly, and treated as its 'détracteur,' because of his critical attitude towards its policy (for example, towards the plans for confiscating ecclesiastical property, and for dividing France into Departments) as well as towards the general tone of the revolutionary advance.

Meanwhile, though refusing to join 'les patriotes' in the Assembly, Bergasse, who wished France to have a liberal constitution, entered into daily, though secret, relations with Louis XVI. The result was that Mirabeau's counsels were rejected, and Mirabeau himself soon discovered the reason. '*C'est Bergasse, he said, qui conseille en ce moment, et qui pousse la cour; j'ai même (et ceci est capital au plus haut degré) la copie de la lettre que le Roi doit écrire à l'Assemblée.*' Bergasse had reason for seriously distrusting Mirabeau, whose growing influence was due, he thought, to the strength of a fixed personal ambition, which was able to prevail at a time of general unrest. Mirabeau himself was still anxious to use Bergasse, and approached him with an invitation to combine in making the plan of a constitution. The invitation was refused. This effort made by Mirabeau to gain Bergasse for his own ends was the continuation of a policy witnessed to by the depositions at the Châtelet, December 11, 1789, where the evidence of Jean Pelletier is as follows¹:

'Dépose ... qu'il a su de la sorte, que M. le Duc d'Orléans fomentoit un parti avec quelques membres de

¹ October 1790.

l'Assemblée Nationale, pour s'emparer de l'administration du royaume ; qu'on lui a dit que le comte de Mirabeau, député d'Aix, et M. de la Clos, officier d'artillerie, étoient ses principaux agens ; que le comte de Mirabeau s'étoit chargé de faire entrer dans le complot les membres les plus purs de l'Assemblée et entre autres M. Mounier, député du Dauphiné, lequel Sieur Mounier avoit assuré que M. de Mirabeau avoit adressé les paroles qui suivent : *Eh mais, bon homme que vous êtes ! qui est ce qui vous a dit qu'il ne faut pas un Roi ? Mais que vous importe que ce soit Louis XVI ou Louis XVII ? Voulez-vous que ce soit toujours le Bambin qui nous gouverne ?* Que ce propos, déjà répandu dans le public, a été répété à lui déposant, avec cette seule variation, *Louis ou Philippe* : observe qu'il lui paroît essentiel d'appeler M. Mounier à confirmer, par son témoignage, un propos aussi grave ; qu'il lui a été dit pareillement que le Sieur comte de Mirabeau avoit entrepris de séduire M. Bergasse, député de Lyon, et membre, ainsi que M. Mounier, du premier comité de Constitution ; mais qu'on varie entre M. Bergasse lui-même ou Me. Duveyrier, avocat, à qui s'adressa la proposition ; que lui, déposant, se rappelle même avoir entendu dire que pour flatter l'amour-propre de M. Bergasse, M. le Comte de Mirabeau avoit proposé de se contenter d'un poste inférieur à celui qu'il se réservoit pour lui-même : ce déposant observe que le témoignage de MM. Duveyrier et Bergasse, de présent à Paris, détruira ou confirmera cette déposition qu'il déclare encore une fois n'être fondée que sur des bruits publics.¹

Compare with this account the description of Mirabeau's methods in *La Journée des Dupes*² :

'Tu connais mes principes, j'ai mis en mouvement les deux grands agens du monde : l'intérêt et la vanité. Déjà ces avocats, dont la horde obscurcit l'assemblée, se croient autant de potentats.'

And again³ :

'Je me sers de la vanité de Yetafet qui veut avoir le monarque sous sa garde, je l'ai excité par mes émissaires : mais tout sera consommé par les mains les plus viles.'

¹ This deposition was confirmed by Bergasse, by Regnier and others.

² Act I. sc. 1, p. 11.

Bergasse strongly criticised the constitution of 1791, but against his advice Louis XVI accepted it. In a communication to the 'Correspondance Politique' of 1792, Bergasse thus summed up the situation :

'... le temps de la sagesse est passé, la raison n'a plus de voix, les crimes appellent la force, et il n'appartient plus qu'à la force de faire la destinée des empires.'

The relations between the King and Bergasse continued to be close.¹ After the invasion of the Tuileries by the people on June 20, 1792, Louis XVI wrote to Bergasse to ask him to compose a royal address to the Departments. This was done, and proved to some extent effective, since seventy Departments protested against the late events. Louis XVI also charged Bergasse with the duty of preparing a plan for a new constitution to come into effect on the day when royalty should have recovered its power. When on August 10, 1792, the Royal family were compelled to take refuge with the Legislative Assembly, these papers of Bergasse's were found in the *armoire de fer* and burnt. Bergasse, however, had placed a copy at Lyon, and though that too was burnt, a *précis* remains of this document, so illustrative of the pathetic hopefulness and denseness of Louis XVI. This attitude of the King, repeated by the Royalist party, is suggested in the character of the aristocrat, La Peyrouse, in *La Journée des Dupes*.²

Bergasse did not leave Paris after August 10. He was appointed one of the 'Conseil de défense' for the King at his trial, and remained at hand till after the execution of Louis XVI, of which he has left a striking account.³

The history of Bergasse during the Terror, his retirement to Bagnères with his wife, his arrest there and journey to Paris in a *charette*, his final imprisonment and release, form an interesting episode of the time. Later he became in turn an adherent of the First Empire and of the restored Bourbon dynasty. From time to time he made an appear-

¹ Mirabeau died April 3, 1791.

² See Act I. sc. 3 and 4; Act II. sc. 4.

³ See Lamy, *Nicolas Bergasse*, p. 179.

ance on the political stage, as for example when he came forward as a personal friend of the Tsar Alexander of Russia to help in the formation of the Holy Alliance, believing that it expressed two of his principles : a faith in the sovereignty of God, and in the solidarity of nations. The Revolution of 1830 was a disappointment to him, but his eternal hopefulness showed itself in the note written on the corner of his last unfinished MS., 'Dieu encore.' His last years were spent in composing philosophic essays on liberty, on universal harmony, and on the place of man in creation. He was most at home in the society of political mystics like Bonald and Joseph de Maistre, while his idea that political liberty could only be gained by education in the severe discipline of citizenship expressed a view afterwards stated by De Tocqueville.

Besides the definite allusions to persons and parties in *La Journée des Dupes*, there are frequent allusions to the political principles which controlled the acts of Bergasse throughout his career. We find recalled in the play his respect for property, and especially for the property of the Church. This is shown in the exposure of Mirabeau's plans for diverting 'les biens du clergé.'¹ Again, Bergasse's care for the protection of the individual is shown in the scenes where La Peyrouse comes in, and also in the dialogue between Mounier and 'Bimeaura,'² where Mounier reproaches Mirabeau for his treatment of the King—'le premier citoyen de l'État,' and accuses him of causing 'une calamité publique' under the name of liberty : tyrannising in the name of authority over opinion and feeling. All through the play we find satire on unpractical theories, on abstract ideas that are not related to sanctions of religion and morality. Thus the author satirises the common notion of liberty³; he inquires what it practically means for France, and hears that it brings with it submission to military despotism, and the destruction of commerce and social life. 'Mais qui profite donc de ce changement ?' asks La Peyrouse. La Maîtresse answers 'On dit que c'est

¹ Act III. sc. 8, pp. 67-68.

² Act IV. sc. 2, pp. 76-77.

³ Act III. sc. 2.

l'homme.' 'Mais quel homme ?' is the question. 'Ma foi, ce n'est pas nous toujours. Si nous avions seulement du pain !' At the end of the play La Peyrouse asks again if anyone can have profited by the terrible Revolution :

'... et si tout le monde n'est pas dupe, la découverte des gens qui profitent de cet affreux bouleversement sera le problème dont la solution occupera mes vieux jours.'¹

It remains to be considered how it was that Bergasse, with his clear and active mind, and his deep interest in the principles of politics, should have faded out of the picture of the Revolutionary period, as he appears to have done. Probably this was partly due to the calumny heaped on his name and character at the time of the Kornmann case, in which he acted as *avocat*. This *affaire* was one of great dimensions at the time, though it was originally only a process involving a private household, because the *avocats* put into their speeches their most intimate political convictions. Bergasse's side was defeated, and he incurred the hatred of Beaumarchais, who chose to pillory him under the name of 'Bégearss' in *La Mère Coupable*. This play was acted on June 26, 1792, and increased Bergasse's personal unpopularity by the unfounded suggestion that he had destroyed the peace of a household. Bergasse himself knew that a long time would elapse before he would be judged fairly in either his public or private character. But the incident throws some light on the actual opinions of that elusive political character, Beaumarchais.

Bergasse's biographer, Etienne Lamy, in a recent study² gives a more fundamental reason for the neglect of Bergasse as a political and literary force in France. His chief tenets were the organisation of society under a Divine dispensation, and the conception of society as built upon the unit of the family. These tenets, which represent the conservative side of French thought, were opposed at the time of the Revolution by the advanced party, who were determined to experiment with the reverse order of ideas.

¹ Act IV. sc. 7.

² *Nicolas Bergasse*, Introduction par Etienne Lamy. Perrin et Cie.

Thus they put forward a belief in the efficiency of man as a builder of the state, and in a structure of society in which the individual and not the family group should be the real unit. The one party based politics on the moral sanction, the other on natural right. When once the Revolution had begun, therefore, Bergasse could get no hearing for his ideas. As his genius was of the type suited to political oratory rather than to literary expression, and the former outlet was denied him by circumstances, he had no opportunity of bringing his own theories to the test of experience. But the play, *La Journée des Dupes*, if it is indeed Bergasse's, would seem to demand a hearing not accorded in his own day to Bergasse's political pamphlets; for he was here attempting to explain to the France of 1790 what were the forces which were actually moving her, and in what direction they were tending. He estimated the ideas and practice of the Assembly with just and severe criticism: and the appeal of the play, though hardly dramatic, is that of the political orator who is forcing attention from the mob in the effort to make the people rationally conscious of their action at a moment of grave national crisis. That crisis was at hand in 1789. The whole feeling of the people was aroused to complete the destruction of the political edifice, the three estates, with the monarch at the head. While Bergasse's play fulfilled a condition of drama by its criticism of contemporary life, the pamphlets in dramatic form which came out later act as reflections of a militant and aggressive spirit and are tracts rather than literature. Such is, for example, *Le Triomphe du Tiers-Etat, ou les ridicules de la noblesse, comédie heroi-tragique*. Here the noble is made to confess in the end his adherence to a belief in liberty and equality.

With the fall of the Bastille and the hastening of the Revolutionary movement the particular 'genre' represented by *La Journée des Dupes*, and the other satires mentioned, ceased to exist. The reflection of the national spirit was checked by party politics, until a more settled condition of society allowed the critical spirit freer play on the stage.

(d) CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

COMÉDIE.	DRAME.	TRAGÉDIE.
1690. Boursault, <i>Fables d'Esope</i> . Regnard, <i>Les Filles errantes</i> .	1690. Mme. Bernard, <i>Brunoë</i> .	
1691. Regnard, <i>La Coquette</i> .	1691. Racine, <i>Athalie</i> . Campastron, <i>Tiridate</i> .	
1692. Regnard et Dufresny, <i>Les Chinois</i> .	1692.	1692.
1693. Regnard, <i>La Baguette de Vulcain</i> .	1693.	1693.
1694. Regnard, <i>La Siévrade</i> . Dufresny, <i>Attendez-moi une Forme</i> . Bourault, <i>La Comédie sans titre</i> .	1694.	1694. Longepierre, <i>Mélie, Bourouult, Germanicus</i> . <i>Marie Stuart</i> .
1695. Regnard et Dufresny, <i>La Foire St. Germain</i> .	1695.	1695. La Grange-Chanoel, <i>Milagro</i> .
1696. Regnard, <i>Le Joueur</i> , <i>Le Bal</i> .	1696.	1696.
1697. Dancourt, <i>Les Bourgeoises à la Mode</i> . Regnard et Dufresny, <i>Pasquin et Maforio</i> . Regnard, <i>Le Distrait</i> .	1697.	1697. La Grange-Chanoel, <i>Oreste et Pyrame</i> .
1698.	1698.	1698. La Fosse, <i>Manline Capitoline</i> .
1699.	1699.	1699. La Fosse, <i>Police</i> .
1700. Dancourt, <i>Les Bourgeoises de qualité</i> . Regnard, <i>Démocrite</i> , <i>Le Retour impéritu</i> .	1700.	1700.
1701. Boursault, <i>Esope à la Cour</i> .	1701.	1701. Mlle. Barbier, <i>Arie et Pastus</i> .
1702.	1702.	1702.
1703. Baron, <i>L'Andrienne</i> .	1703.	1703. La Grange-Chanoel, <i>Alceste</i> . Crébillon, <i>Idoménée</i> .
1704. Regnard, <i>Les Foîtes amoureuses</i> .	1704.	1704. Pellégrin, <i>Polidore</i> .
1705. Regnard, <i>Les Méchimes</i> .	1705.	1705. Crébillon, <i>Arie et Thyeste</i> .
1706.	1706.	1706. Crébillon, <i>Electre</i> .
1707. Le Sage, <i>Crispin rivel de son maître</i> .	1707.	1707.
1708. Le Sage, <i>La Tonine</i> . Regnard, <i>Le Légataire uni-versel</i> . Le Grand, <i>La Famille extravagante</i> .	1708.	1708. Mlle. Barbier, <i>La Mort de César</i> .
1709. Le Sage, <i>Turcaret</i> .	1709.	1710.
1710.	1710.	

1711.	Crébillon, <i>Rhadamiste et Zénobie</i> .	1711.	Crébillon, <i>Rhadamiste et Zénobie</i> .
1712.	Duché, <i>Ahasalom</i> .	1712.	Duché, <i>Ahasalom</i> .
1713.		1713.	
1714.	Crébillon, <i>Zerzea</i> .	1714.	Crébillon, <i>Zerzea</i> .
1715.		1715.	
1716.	Le Grand, <i>L'Aveugle clairvoyant</i> .	1716.	Crébillon, <i>Athalie, Semiramis</i> .
1717.		1717.	Crébillon, <i>Athalie, Semiramis</i> .
1718.	Le Grand, <i>Le Roi de Cocagne</i> .	1718.	Voltaire, <i>Oedipe</i> .
1719.		1719.	
1720.	Marivaux, <i>Arlequin</i> .	1720.	Voltaire, <i>Artémire</i> .
1721.		1721.	La Motte, <i>Les Macchabées</i> .
1722.	Marivaux, <i>Surprise de l'environs</i> .	1722.	Abbe Genest, <i>Pénélope</i> .
1723.		1723.	La Motte, <i>l'nez de Castro</i> .
1724.		1724.	Voltaire, <i>Mariamne</i> .
1725.		1725.	Crébillon, <i>Pyrrhus</i> .
1726.	Voltaire, <i>l'Indiscret</i> .	1726.	
1726.	Joly, <i>La Femme jalouse, La Capricieuse</i> .	1726.	Voltaire, <i>Bruitius</i> .
1727.	Destouches, <i>Le Philosophe marié</i> .	1727.	
1728.	Piron, <i>L'Ecole des pères</i> .	1728.	
1729.		1729.	
1730.	Marivaux, <i>Le Jeu de l'environs et du hasard</i> .	1730.	Voltaire, <i>Bruitius</i> .
1731.		1731.	Voltaire, <i>La Mort de Cleopatra</i> .
1732.	Delamay, <i>Le Complaisant</i> . Voltaire, <i>Les Origines de Monseigneur du cap-vert</i> . Destouches, <i>Le Glorieux</i> .	1732.	Voltaire, <i>Zaire, Eryphyle</i> .
1733.	Destouches, <i>L'Ambitieux et l'Indiscret</i> .	1733.	La Chaussee, <i>La Fausse Antipathie</i> .
1734.		1734.	Voltaire, <i>Adelaïde du Guerdin</i> .
1735.		1735.	
1736.	Marivaux, <i>Le Legs</i> .	1736.	La Chaussee, <i>Préjugé à la mode</i> .
1737.	Marivaux, <i>Les Fausses Confidences</i> . Destouches, <i>Le Dissipateur, L'Ambitieux et l'Indiscret</i> (part formed).	1737.	Voltaire, <i>l'Enfant prodigue</i> .
			1737.

COMÉDIE.

DRAME.	TRAGÉDIE.
1738. Piron, <i>Méromanie</i> .	1738. <i>La Nôtre, Mahomet Second.</i>
1739. Destouches, <i>L'Amour sei.</i>	1739. <i>La Nôtre, Mahomet Second.</i>
1740. Voltaire, <i>La Prude.</i>	1740. <i>Voltaire, Zalime.</i>
1741. Destouches, <i>L'Amour sei.</i>	1741. <i>La Chaussee, Milanda.</i>
1742. Desmatins, <i>L'Impertinent.</i>	1742. <i>La Chaussee, Amour pour amour.</i>
1743. Destouches, <i>Pamela.</i>	1743. <i>La Chaussee, Pamela.</i>
1744. Gresset, <i>Le Méchant.</i> Voltaire, <i>La Princesse de Navarre.</i>	1744. <i>Voltaire, Pamela.</i>
1745. Gresset, <i>Le Méchant.</i> Voltaire, <i>La Princesse de Navarre.</i>	1745. <i>Voltaire, Pamela.</i>
1746. Voltaire, <i>La Prude.</i>	1746. <i>La Chaussee, Le Rival de lui-même.</i>
1747. Destouches, <i>Le Dissipateur (performed).</i>	1747. <i>La Chaussee, La Gouvernante.</i>
1748. Desmatins, <i>L'Impertinent.</i>	1748. <i>Voltaire, Séminariste.</i>
1749. Desmatins, <i>L'Impertinent.</i>	1749. <i>Voltaire, Narine.</i>
1750. Desmatins, <i>L'Impertinent.</i>	1750. <i>Voltaire, Orada.</i>
1751. Desmatins, <i>L'Homme de fortune.</i>	1751. <i>La Chaussee, L'Homme de fortune.</i>
1752. Destouches, <i>Le Dissipateur (performed).</i>	1752. <i>Voltaire, Andria, Rome accorde.</i>
1753. Destouches, <i>Le Dissipateur (performed).</i>	1753. <i>Châteaubrun, Les Troyennes.</i>
1754. Desmatins, <i>L'Impertinent.</i>	1754. <i>Crébillon, Le Triomvirat.</i>
1755. La Noue, <i>La Coquette corrigée.</i>	1755. <i>Châteaubrun, Philocrite.</i>
1756. La Noue, <i>La Coquette corrigée.</i>	1756. <i>Voltaire, L'Orphelin de la Chine.</i>
1757. Diderot, <i>Le Fils naturel.</i>	1757. <i>Diderot, Le Fils naturel.</i>
1758. Diderot, <i>Le Père de famille.</i>	1758. <i>Guimond de la Touche, l'Inhénie en Tauride.</i>
1759. Saurin, <i>Les Mœurs du temps.</i>	1759. <i>Renou, La Mort d'Hercule.</i>
1759. Saurin, <i>Les Mœurs du temps.</i>	1759. <i>La Place, Adèle de Pontibus.</i>
1760. Palissot, <i>Les Philosophes.</i>	1760. <i>Lemierre, Hyperrémie.</i>
1760. Voltaire, <i>L'Écosaise.</i>	1760. <i>Poinset, Brièse.</i>
1761. Diderot, <i>Le Père de famille (performed).</i>	1761. <i>Voltaire, Socrate.</i>
	1761. <i>Voltaire, Tancrede.</i>

1762.	Sedaine, <i>Le Roi et le Fermier</i> . Voltaire, <i>Le Droit du Seigneur</i> . Favart, <i>L'Anglais à Bordeaux</i> . Dampierre, <i>Le Négoiant</i> . Collé, <i>Dupuis et Des Renais</i> .	1762.	
1763.	Poïnainet, <i>Le Cercle</i> . Sedaine, <i>Le Philosophe sans le savoir</i> . Sauvin, <i>L'Orpheline Ulysse</i> .	1763.	Sauvigny, <i>La Mort de Socrate</i> .
1764.	Colk, <i>Partie de Chasse de Henri IV</i> . Beaumarchais, <i>Eugénie</i> . Voltaire, <i>Chardou</i> .	1764.	La Harpe, <i>Warrick, Timonien</i> . Lomière, <i>Ialomène</i> . De Belloy, <i>Le Siège de Calais</i> .
1765.	Poïnainet, <i>Le Philosophe sans le savoir</i> .	1765.	Voltaire, <i>Olympie, Le Triomvirat</i> . La Harpe, <i>Gustave Vaea</i> . Lomière, <i>Guillaume Tell</i> .
1766.	Sedaine, <i>La Gageure imprudente</i> . Moisy, <i>Les Deux Frères</i> .	1766.	Voltaire, <i>Les Scythes</i> .
1767.	Rochon de Chabannes, <i>Hylas et Sylvie</i> . Sedaine et Montigny, <i>Le Déserteur</i> .	1767.	
1768.	Sedaine, <i>La Gageure imprudente</i> . Moisy, <i>Les Deux Frères</i> .	1768.	Ducis, <i>Hamlet</i> .
1769.	Poinainet, <i>Le Cercle (performed)</i> . Beaumarchais, <i>Le Barbier de Séville</i> . Voltaire, <i>Le Depositaire</i> .	1769.	Voltaire, <i>Les Gaétes</i> .
1770.	Sedaine et Montigny, <i>Le Déserteur</i> . Beaumarchais, <i>Les Deux Amis</i> .	1770.	La Harpe, <i>Mélanie</i> . Lomière, <i>La Veuve de Malabar</i> .
1771.	Poinainet, <i>Le Cercle (performed)</i> . Beaumarchais, <i>Le Barbier de Séville</i> . Voltaire, <i>Le Depositaire</i> .	1771.	Bacchard d'Arnaud, <i>Fayol</i> . Lefèvre, <i>Floride</i> .
1772.		1772.	
1773.		1773.	Mervier, <i>La Brouette des Vinassiers</i> .
1774.		1774.	Diderot, <i>Le Fils naturel</i> (performed).
1775.	Poinainet, <i>Le Barbier de Séville (performed)</i> .	1775.	Mervier, <i>L'Indigent, Le Faune Ami</i> , 1772.
1776.		1776.	Jean Hennuyer, <i>Oiseade et Sophronie</i> .
1777.	Mervier, <i>Les Comédians</i> .	1777.	Ducis, <i>Roméo et Juliette</i> .

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8.	Barthe, <i>L'Homme personnel</i> .	1778.	Mercier, <i>L'Habitant de la Gaudaloupe</i> .	Ducis, <i>Oedipe chez Almidée</i> .
9.	Rochon de Chabannes, <i>L'Amour française</i> .	1779.	Mercier, <i>Le Campagnard</i> .	Voltaire, <i>Agricole (posthumous)</i> .
10.	Mercier, <i>La Demande impérieuse, L'Homme de ma connaissance</i> .	1780.		Le Comte du Guibert, <i>Le Mort des Croqueurs</i> . La Harpe, <i>Phalesteine</i> .

DRANE.

8.	Barthe, <i>L'Homme personnel</i> .	1778.	Mercier, <i>L'Habitant de la Gaudaloupe</i> .	Ducis, <i>Oedipe chez Almidée</i> .
9.	Rochon de Chabannes, <i>L'Amour française</i> .	1779.	Mercier, <i>Le Campagnard</i> .	Voltaire, <i>Armada</i> (posthumous).
10.	Mercier, <i>La Demande impérieuse, L'Homme de ma connaissance</i> .	1780.		Le Comte du Guibert, <i>Le Mort des Croqueurs</i> . La Harpe, <i>Phaéton</i> .

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8.	Barthe, <i>L'Homme personnel</i> .	1778.	Mercier, <i>L'Habitant de la Gaudaloupe</i> .	Ducis, <i>Oedipe chez Almidée</i> .
9.	Rochon de Chabannes, <i>L'Amour française</i> .	1779.	Mercier, <i>Le Campagnard</i> .	Voltaire, <i>Agradoche (posthumous)</i> .
10.	Mercier, <i>La Demande impérieuse, L'Homme de ma connaissance</i> .	1780.		Le Comte du Guibert, <i>Le Mort des Croqueurs</i> . La Harpe, <i>Phalesteine</i> .

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D'Arvigny, <i>Les Bérenges de l'amour</i> .	1781.			
Mercier, <i>Le Géniullière</i> .				
Imbert, <i>Le Jalousx sans amour</i> .	1781.			
Andrieux, <i>Anacizimandre</i> .				
Favart fils, <i>Le Diable Boiteux</i> .	1782.			
Desforges, <i>Tom Jones à Londres</i> .				
Du Buisson, <i>Le Vieux Garçon</i> .				
D'Harleville, <i>L'Inconscient</i> .	1783.			
Beaumarchais, <i>Le Mariage de Figaro</i> .	1784.			
Vigée, <i>La Fausse Coquette</i> .				
Lasalle, <i>L'Oncle et les deux tantes</i> .	1785.			
Beauvoir, <i>Les Amis du jour</i> .	1786.			
Du Buisson, <i>Le Vieux Garçon</i> .				
D'Harleville, <i>L'Inconscient</i> .	1787.			
Andrieux, <i>Les Flourdies</i> .				
Piètre, <i>L'Ecole des pères</i> .				
Chabanon, <i>Le Faux Noble</i> .				
D'Harleville, <i>L'Optimiste</i> .	1788.			
D'Harleville, <i>Les Châteaux en Espagne</i> , <i>Le Vieus Célibataire</i> .	1789.			
Bergasse, <i>La Journée des dupes</i> .				
Fabre d'Eglantine, <i>Le Présomptueux</i> .	1790.			
Klierine, <i>Le Nouveau Doyen de Klierine</i> .				
Mercier, <i>Charles II. Roi d'Angleterre</i> .	1790.			
Le Mercier, <i>Mulgrave</i> .	1790.			
M. J. Chétier, <i>Henri VIII. La Mort de Charles IX.</i>				
Ronsin, <i>Louis XII.</i>				
M. J. Chétier, <i>Henri VIII. La Mort de Charles IX.</i>				

1791.	D'Harleville, <i>Monsieur de Crac.</i> Picard, <i>Le Passé, le Présent, l'Avenir.</i>	1791.	Ducis, <i>Jean sans terre.</i>
1792.	D'Harleville, <i>Le Vieux Châtelaire</i> (performed).	1792.	Beaumarchais, <i>La Mère coupable.</i> Mercier, <i>Le Vieillard et ses trois filles.</i> Lemercier, <i>Clarisse Harlowe.</i>
1793.	Picard, <i>Les Suspects.</i>	1793.	Legouvé, <i>La Mort d'Abel.</i>
1794.	Picard, <i>Andros.</i>	1794.	Ducis, <i>Othello.</i>
1795.		1795.	M. J. Chénier, <i>Oaius Gracchus.</i>
1796.	Le Mercier, <i>Le Tartuffe révolutionnaire.</i>	1796.	M. J. Chénier, <i>Fenelon.</i>
1797.	Maillet, <i>Madame Angot.</i>	1797.	M. J. Chénier, <i>Timaldon.</i>
1798.		1798.	Maréchal, <i>Le Jugement dernier des rois.</i>
1799.	Picard, <i>Les Voisines.</i>	1799.	Ducis, <i>Abufar.</i>
1800.	D'Harleville, <i>Les Mœurs du jour.</i>	1799.	
	Picard, <i>Le Collatéral.</i>	1800.	
1801.	Picard, <i>Les Trois Marie.</i>	1801.	
1802.	Picard, <i>La Petite Ville.</i>	1802.	
	Picard, <i>Duchateauxre.</i>		
1803.	Andrieux, <i>Hélénis.</i>		
1804.	D'Harleville, <i>Malice pour Malice.</i>	1803.	Lemercier, <i>Isule et Ororoë.</i>
	Picard, <i>Les Marionnettes.</i>	1804.	M. J. Chénier, <i>Cyrus.</i>
1805.	Philibert.	1805.	
1806.		1806.	
1807.		1807.	
1808.	Lemercier, <i>Plasie, ou la Comédie Latine.</i>	1808.	Lemercier, <i>Christophe Colombe.</i>
1809.		1809.	
1810.	Andrieux, <i>Le Vieux Pat.</i>	1810.	

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